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# The Revolution Will Be Social and Poetic: The Insurgent Poetics of Decolonial Thought

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## Abstract

This thesis examines decolonization from the theoretical perspective put forth by Walter Mignolo and others as modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. It understands decoloniality to be a political-epistemic project grounded in the critique of colonial structures of violent domination as well as the autopoietic self-organization of autonomous communities. It argues that poetics as a creative relation of language to the social body is necessary in order to produce knowledge by thinking from and with these autonomous communities. Basing its examination of decolonization on the work of poets Aimé Césaire, Cecilia Vicuña and Beth Brant, this thesis shows how poetics forms a horizon in which the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject, the metacritique of reason in the space of the border, and an ethics of political liberation can ground new ways of instituting global concrete humanity.

## Keywords

Walter Mignolo, Sylvia Wynter, coloniality, decoloniality, poetics, autopoiesis, Indigenous thought, Black thought, Caribbean, settler colonialism

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## Preface

My thesis will examine the significance of poetics for political-epistemic projects of decolonization, as theorized through the formal schema of modernity/coloniality/-decoloniality. Arising in relation to the work of Black and Indigenous thinkers and social movements throughout the Americas, modernity/coloniality/decoloniality refers to the entangled, co-constitutive nature of the relationship between colonial structures of power and modernity, as well as the creative refusal of this relationship by colonized subjects in order to create alternative forms of knowing, doing, and living. In this context, poetry engages in decolonial projects through an embodied relationship of both production, from the perspective of the poet, and consumption, from the perspective of the reader, with interrelated epistemic, political, and ethical stakes involved as meaning is shared across this space. In this productive-consumptive relation, the poem creates a relation of decolonial mediation that not only formalizes the embodied experiences of the poet as a historically and socially produced subject, but furthermore challenges the reader to engage this space in a way that resists passive consumption. This dynamic of resistance and creation via cross-cultural engagement is thus capable of opening pathways to an embodied decolonial subjectivity, conceptualized by Walter D. Mignolo and others as '*thinking from/with*' those in radical exteriority. This entails a double focus throughout the thesis, pursued through a single line of analysis. On the one hand, I will be concerned with the way in which poetry is capable of facilitating an engagement with the production of meaning that can further decolonial projects through insurgent interruptions of dominant narratives. On the other, I will use this engagement with poetics to think through the fundamental features of decolonial thought as an autopoietic practice organizing the material-symbolic structure of the world. I will do so by reading the work of several poets of the Americas, linking their concrete local experiences and concerns to global processes and structures so as to reveal the potentiality of shared epistemic, political, and ethical strategies of resistance capable of forming solidarities across distinct experiences within the horizon of decoloniality.

After the introduction in which I will examine modernity/coloniality/decoloniality in more depth, as well as its relation to poetry as a medium for cross-cultural engagement, my thesis will consider the following: first, the poetry of Aimé Césaire through the lens of Black and Caribbean thought examining the role of body- and geo-politics in conceptualizing the

philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject; second, the border-crossing performance poetics of Cecilia Vicuña, examining the immanent temporality of border encounters as a space to articulate new epistemologies and forms of agency in a global frame through translation; third, the poetry of Mohawk poet Beth Brant through the lens of Indigenous feminist critiques examining the politics of relationality through which ethical communities and solidarities can engage shared burdens of history. Finally, I will wrap up with a conclusion on the ways in which coloniality can not only highlight the shared bases and concerns of these various modes of resistance, but further, how it can facilitate dialogue within and across diverse subalternized locations beyond of the structuring coherence of coloniality and the global North.

I have limited the scope of my thesis to the Americas, despite the global reach of coloniality at large, for several reasons. First, the theory of modernity/coloniality, building off of world-systems theory, Caribbean thought, Third World socialisms/feminisms, and Latin American Philosophy, first emerges in the work of Latin American and Caribbean thinkers. Thus, while capable of expanding beyond these borders, necessitating it even, coloniality, and much of the work that has gone into it to date, is uniquely suited to the geopolitical and cultural space of the Americas. However, this does not mean that I am simply and schematically applying coloniality as a framework, as I will be extending its reach to a North American settler-colonial context which, in theories of modernity/coloniality, is all too often elided in favour of an undifferentiated view of it as the global North. Second, the Americas provides a unique and fecund space for examining modernity/coloniality as it is the arrival of Europeans in the so called New World, their encounter with the Indigenous nations and their forced relocation of enslaved Africans, that is the initializing moment in which the system of power and knowledge that became the modern/colonial world system begins to emerge. Furthermore, as the world-system continues to develop in complexity, the Americas continue to be a fecund site for examining the transformations of coloniality in the present day.

I have chosen poetry as the site to examine the potential for decolonizing resistances and relationships for reasons that will be explored in greater depth in the introduction, but a short word on it here will help to situate my thesis. First, in the coloniality of power and knowledge, literature has been a key site for forms of cultural governance. From its earliest

importation into the Americas it has functioned as a means of establishing national identities as well as a means of critiquing those identities in order to expand or complicate them over time. Thus, poetry as literature proves to be a key site mediating the entrance of bodies and knowledges into the global order. Second, and most importantly, is the key role that poetics itself plays in decolonization. As will be shown later, decolonization is a political and epistemological practice that creates alternative ways of being and knowing to those authorized by hegemonic Western rationalities and their hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality manifested in particular bodies and communities. It is both a critique of these discourses, as well as an opening up of alternative horizons from subalternized bodies and traditions. A key to this process then is finding, and thinking/doing from, alternative situations, understood as distinct, embodied ways of being in the world, of the experience of time and space, and relating to others in shared proximity prior to the building of discourses from these experiences. Poetics, as a creative use of language, is thus a site at which these pre-discursive concrete forms of life can be articulated with larger discourses, in various relations of affirmation and resistance. Poetry, or rather each poem or body of work, is thus an articulation of distinct ways of being and knowing that the poetics can allow us to articulate and make meaningful as a means of examining how these forms variously engage with, collude and/or resist modernity/coloniality.

Ultimately, what decolonial theory reveals to us is that knowledge production rests on relations to the world that delineate who has the authority and legitimacy to make their points of view or experiences significant in the articulation of social meaning. Before responding to the work of Black or Indigenous poets in a decolonial way that will destabilize preconceived relations and lead to a decolonial subjectivity and solidarity, one must be willing to acknowledge Black and Indigenous experience as a legitimate point of knowledge production to be engaged with in ethical and political ways. A decolonial poetics confronts this constitutive choice by: 1) constructing its poetics from the productivity of the writer in a way that seeks to formalize language from their embodied experiences; 2) by making use of the immanence of art in order to disrupt its smooth consumption by the audience so as to confront them, make them see the gap between them and the writer that is cultural difference and socio-political positionality; and 3) to encourage the reader to negotiate this space through the poem in a manner that necessitates a certain ability on their part to give up

authority to the experience of the poet. Poetics, then, is necessary to the practice of conceptualizing Mignolo's idea of '*thinking from/with*' those in radical exteriority, by connecting diverse peoples, places and histories; and energizing them in order to produce these connections in specifically decolonial ways. This is the role that poetics plays in decolonial thought, connecting aesthetics to the discourses of theory, the body to knowledge, critique to the creation of alternative horizons of thinking and doing.



## Introduction: Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality and Poetics as Autopoiesis

In this introduction I will lay out a framework for understanding decolonial thought, contextualizing it in relation to the equation modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. I will argue that decoloniality is a political-epistemic project grounded in the cosmologies and memories of colonized and racialized communities who have been incorporated into the modern capitalist world system via various organizations of colonial power. While these communities find themselves dominated and exploited within this modern/colonial world system, decoloniality nonetheless provides new horizons of meaning in the production of knowledge. Thus, decoloniality requires a necessary articulation of knowing and doing, of thinking from/with the bodies, communities, memories, and desires of diverse subjects who participate in the building of new worlds beyond the hierarchical structures of domination, vulnerability, and violence that subtend the global political-epistemic order. Further, I will argue that an understanding of poetics in relation to autopoiesis is necessary for this project. The articulation of poetics and linguistic practice and autopoiesis as creative self-production conjoin the practices of self-making present in Sylvia Wynter's call for sociopoetics as "an alternative process of making ourselves human" (Wynter 89) with Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's work on the biological, social and linguistic forms of structural coupling which define humanity biologically and socially as a "continually self-producing... autopoietic organization" (Maturana and Varela 43). From this articulation of poetics as the autopoietic force, expressed in language, of autonomous communities seeking political liberation according to their own cultural-epistemic traditions and social formations, I will argue for a series of principles of decolonial poesis that are necessary for the articulation of complex solidarities between distinct ways of knowing and doing within the overall horizon of decoloniality. Together, these principles will seek to answer what philosopher Lewis Gordon argues are the three core concerns of decoloniality: philosophical anthropology; the metacritique of reason; and political liberation (Decolonization 87-8). Ultimately, I will seek to show the crucial role that poetics plays in thinking and writing as embodied, relational practices within concrete systems of domination, vulnerability, and violence

that can nonetheless sustain and articulate the inexhaustible desires, imaginings, and practices by which communities seek new ways of living in the world. I will chart the precarious, entangled relationship between culture and politics, the body and knowledge, arguing that decoloniality seeks to undo any binary opposition of these terms from the always-embodied perspective of the colonial difference, not so as to reify the poet or theorist as a saviour, but to place their practice in a critical relation to the various communities they are entangled with as part of a shared practice of what Walter Mignolo calls thinking from/with rather than for/about.

Thus, I will begin this introductory chapter by examining the history and conceptualization of modernity/coloniality/decoloniality as it has been theorized by some of its leading thinkers, focusing on the work of Walter Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Lewis R. Gordon, and Sylvia Wynter in particular. This will involve an explication of each of these terms as well as their interrelatedness as a universe of meaning meant to link certain embodied struggles to the horizon of an alternative ordering of the world beyond current hierarchies of domination and their supporting political-epistemic model of humanity as Imperial Man. I will then move on to a brief discussion of the relationship between the body, violence, and knowledge in the construction of these hierarchies as political-epistemic structures. From this, I will show how understanding knowledge production as a contingent practice of autopoiesis allows for a re-situating of the body in relation to community so as to account for and resist the forms of violence that structure the distribution of agency and vulnerability instituted by modernity/coloniality. Finally, in considering how decoloniality as a horizon of meaning constructs knowledge(s) as an embodied practice from which to think from the community towards the transformation of the world, I will argue that a sociopoetics of insurgency is vital for articulating the complex solidarity of decolonial desires with the production of critical thought.

Modernity/coloniality as a concept emerges from a double genealogy. On the one hand, as Alejandro Vallega argues in his work *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority* (2014), the concept of coloniality, emerges from the history of Latin American philosophy and its attempts to think the uniqueness of Latin America in

relation to hegemonic forms of Eurocentric philosophy. Key to this have been the insights of Enrique Dussel and Anibal Quijano, who linked the process of knowledge production to the geopolitical and historical relations of domination that structure Latin American experience. Building on the world systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein and its model of center-periphery capitalist structural organization, Dussel recognized that “the exteriority of the centre is not other than the difference intrinsic to modernity, an exteriority created by the colonialist system that accompanies and is inseparable from Western modernity” (Vallega 64). Thus, modernity/coloniality springs from the critique of Western instrumental reason and capitalist exploitation through an attentive engagement with the colonial processes that produce its normative coherence and sustain its hierarchical organization of center-periphery. It is this initial step that Quijano would formalize with his concept of the colonial matrix of power, which I will examine below. On the other hand, modernity/coloniality has also emerged through the engagement with other, non-Western ways of knowing and doing. This thinking from and with the dominated bodies and communities, rather than just thinking about their geopolitical relationships and histories internal to a universalized capitalist-modernity, is what allows theories of modernity/coloniality to function not simply as critique, but as new productive horizons through which to imagine new ways of knowing and doing. Hence, for Walter D. Mignolo, decolonial thought is both analytic and prospective, concerned with “the analytic [critique] of coloniality...and building communities based on a vision of a society that delinks from coloniality” in favour of decoloniality (*Further Thoughts* 35). Here the genealogy of modernity/coloniality and decolonial thought opens up beyond Latin America to embrace a global frame that interrelates histories of capitalist expansion and colonial forms of social organization with histories of resistance. Of particular importance to my thesis will be the ways in which modernity/coloniality/decoloniality opens up spaces for Caribbean and Black diasporic thought, Indigenous thought, and Latina/o thought - though we should refrain from conceptualizing any of these traditions as uniform objects while being attentive to their similarities as well as differences. Rather, they constitute what Mignolo refers to as “universes of meaning” grounding the articulation of intellectual projects anchored in specific histories, cosmologies, and ways of living, which we shall see function as autopoietic organizations capable of connecting

across difference in new relationalities beyond modernity/coloniality (Further Thoughts 21).

Thus, it is important to acknowledge that while modernity/coloniality/decoloniality as an intellectual project works on a global level through shared theoretical operations to open up spaces for various colonized knowledges, its specificity with regards to both critique and new horizons of knowing and doing occurs under distinct forms of domination and vulnerability that structure its theoretical insights. That is to say, while theories of modernity/coloniality/decoloniality make room for both Black critique as well as Indigenous thought, the specificity of the histories and forms of domination undergone by both mean that their engagement takes place through concrete political-epistemic relationships, and that their separate insights need to be read alongside each other in order to fully critique the modern/colonial organization of power, knowledge and bodies. As I will argue, this means, ultimately, that knowledge production must be conceptualized as an embodied practice, a relationship that brings to the fore the necessary socio-poetics of knowledge that can connect thinking and doing to decoloniality as an epistemic-political project. Importantly, this will involve an engagement with both different forms of embodiment, such as Blackness and Indigeneity, as well as the histories and structures of colonialism that relate to them, such as extractive- and settler-colonial regimes. It is from these concrete histories that modernity/coloniality/decoloniality seeks a point of complex solidarity, rather than attempting to be a new abstract universal theory capable of explaining every situation. The goal, in other words, is to make a theory that is accountable to colonized and racialized communities, rather than an accounting of them.

Following philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres I will argue that “my use of modernity/coloniality here refers mainly to the idea that it is necessary always to historicize and theorize modernity with the concept of coloniality in mind” (Césaire’s Gift 439). What is coloniality? While a more thorough examination will take up the rest of this introduction, we can begin with Walter D. Mignolo’s statement that “coloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive,

although downplayed, dimension” (Darker 2). Importantly, this logic extends beyond instances of historical and neo- colonialisms to institute a systematic ordering of power, knowledge, and bodies “by way of which the entire planet, including its continental division...becomes articulated in such production of knowledge and classificatory apparatus” to articulate and legitimize the epistemic and socio-political arrangements needed for the expansion of Western colonial-capitalism (Local 17).

Modernity/coloniality then is an understanding of the world-system as an interrelated field of power, knowledge, and being which is organized along internal and external borders that translate differences into values for the purpose of ordering a world for the few at the expense of the many. It is in the apprehension of the existence of the modern/colonial world system, the historicization of modernity via coloniality, that opens up the theoretical space for decoloniality. Importantly, however, it should not be assumed that decolonial desires, knowledges and projects are dependent on their recognition by institutionalized forms of knowledge. Rather, in different localized colonial organizations, decoloniality is grounded in the survival and resurgence of other orders of life and their cosmologies. That is why these orders can be referred to as autonomous though entangled: while subject since sixteenth century to colonial domination, existing in complex relations of cross-cultural contact, there nonetheless persist histories and world views that escape capture, and which continuing regimes of colonial power are focused on eradicating. What the theorization of modernity/coloniality does is open up space for an engagement with these cosmologies and memories via decoloniality so as to critique the structures of domination and violence that have contributed to their eradication and marginalization.

Decoloniality according to Mignolo “is neither the equivalent of disciplinary knowledge nor (for decolonial thinkers) an object of study...neither a discipline nor a method” (Further Thoughts 33). Instead, according Nelson Maldonado-Torres, the decolonial turn “refers to a shift in knowledge production” that “introduces questions about the effects of colonization in modern subjectivities and modern forms of life as well as contributions of racialized and colonized subjectivities to the production of knowledge and critical thinking” (Coloniality 116). In light of these questions, Maldonado-Torres argues that decolonization “refers to the task of building an alternative

world to modernity...[and] to the construction of a new horizon of meaning that includes new conceptions about the human being and material relations that do not conform to the dictatorship of capital and that are not limited by the empire of law in the modern/colonial nation-state form” (Césaire’s Gift 439-40). In other words, it is, as Sylvia Wynter argues, the construction of “an alternative process of making ourselves human; and to free the Western concept of humanism from its tribal aspect of We and the Other, transforming its abstract universal premise into the concretely human global, the concretely WE” (Socio-poetics 89). Importantly, this global concern is predicated on the proliferation of local interventions at various points of antagonism within the modern/colonial world system. It is these local interventions, each with its own valence, its own histories of colonial power and resistance, its own cosmologies and memories, that will work to structure solidarity across the global order and open up space for a new practice of being human.

In light of the importance of the local, and its imbrication with the global, the question emerges as to what, exactly, organizes these concerns across the multiple points of knowing and doing represented by diverse decolonial thinkers, of which the ones mentioned above are only a small sample, and many of whom may articulate their thinking with little to no concrete reference to modernity/coloniality/decoloniality as a set of terms or project. That is, how does decoloniality understand not only itself as a project, but the terms against which it articulates this project, namely ‘modernity’ and ‘coloniality’, the latter being linked to such concepts as the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being with which this thesis is concerned? And how does this understanding of global ordering relate to the concrete embodied forms of humanity that decoloniality seeks to connect? I will now turn to a brief overview of these terms in order to articulate an understanding of decoloniality as a critical project. Furthermore, I will end by arguing that, if decolonial thought is to be neither a method nor a discipline, not an object of inquiry but a horizon of meaning, then poetics itself is a necessary concept for understanding the way in which diverse positions, communities and histories can be articulated within this horizon in order to give decoloniality its necessary purchase as a defined, though fluid, project linking the autopoietic self-organization of autonomous-though-entangled communities and cosmologies. Furthermore, poetics will provide a

means of connecting language to embodied experiences and grounding both in the material, epistemic-political contexts that give them meaning.

The relationship between communities as distinct social formations entangled with their own cosmologies and modes of knowing can be thought through the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. In *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (1987), Maturana and Varela set out to define the relationship between biological processes and human cognition. While I will return to their work in later chapters, what is necessary for now is to understand several key concepts. First, they define the organism, any living organism, as a self-organizing autonomous unity. This self-organizing unity thereby conceives of the organism's relationship to the world as one in which the organization of the organism, its specific structural coherence, creates its world by interpreting the signals which it receives via external stimulus. Furthermore, this creation and interaction is selected for so as to maintain the organism's unity and operational coherence. Importantly, this means that the concept of autonomy here should not be understood as an absolute freedom or agency. Rather, it is an active negotiation of internal and external relationships that link subjects to their environment, including other subjects, in a necessary and yet contingent way - necessary for sustenance while contingent in the possible organizations of life sustaining activity. This, then, is the second point, that of autopoietic self-creation, whereby the organism in its interaction with the environment via its incorporation of external stimuli grows and changes in relation to its own structure. Third, the organism can engage in relationships of structural coupling with its environment or other organisms, such that their autonomous forms of self-organization grow together in a mutual process capable of establishing higher order unities - though whether these unities are arranged via hierarchies of domination or tend towards more harmonious forms of co-existence is something that can only be ascertained in each concrete situation. This leads to the final concept, that of social and linguistic coupling, which defines human interaction as distinct from other forms of structural coupling. It is through linguistic coupling that humans learn to reflect on social interactions, leading to their ability to reflect on themselves and others so as to produce distinct identities and specific modes of social organization. It is from this process that Maturana and Varela argue that all knowing is

doing, as all cognition is related to one's interaction with external stimuli within the shared space of our created worlds.

Humanity is thus both biological and socio-linguistic, and the human is, as Wynter says, a hybrid being, both *bios* and *logos* (Ceremony Found 196). However, as Wynter argues, the particular forms of human being, that is, its social organization along with the narratives by which that society constructs its self-understanding, produce distinct “genres of the human” within concrete relations of structural coupling (ibid). What is important is not that Maturana and Varela, or Wynter for that matter, construct a model of humanity that is either biologically or culturally determined. Rather, what they do is to draw attention to the ways in which the human subject is inherently social, and within this sociality how human groups construct the material and symbolic worlds in which they live. These worlds are themselves open to internal and external changes however, as new structural couplings produce new perturbations, which result in changes to the internal coherence of material and symbolic relations. What is important is that at any given moment, these worlds draw on, or formalize, only some of the structural possibilities available to them. As we shall see, in the case of a colonial situation, these structural formations are subsumed to the material and symbolic needs of the dominating group, but through active decolonial resistance, alternative formations that draw on different structural reservoirs are possible.

In order to understand modernity/coloniality, we must consider the process by which European and non-European practices of humanity were brought into relations of structural coupling. Walter Mignolo argues that the various local instances of colonialism exist within a larger history going back to the Spanish conquest of the Americas, and that this colonial relation of consumption, built off of the “exploitation of labor and expropriation of land” is constitutive of European modernity (Local 7). Mignolo sees such relationships as being at the heart of three breakthroughs in Western society that occurred as it expanded its global reach. These three breakthroughs were: the creation of the capitalist economy, with its colonial and imperial entanglements; the changes in knowledge from the Renaissance onward that led to the scientific revolution; and the disposability of human life, the basis upon which the colonies were exploited and



consumed at the expense of their original and displaced inhabitants. By tying the historical achievements of Western society (capitalism and science) to its colonial history (disposability), Mignolo reveals that “hidden behind the rhetoric of modernity, economic practices dispensed with human lives, and knowledge justified racism and the inferiority of human lives that were naturally considered dispensable” (6). This creates a dichotomous relationship in which two separate spaces are constructed, structured by their own internal logics: the colony as the space of consumption and waste, and the metropole as the space where consumption turns into accumulation and agency, colonialism into modernity, body into intellect. Knowledge and culture become means of displacing this relationship, naturalizing and legitimizing it by making them appear unconnected, a process which modernity/coloniality rejoins, placing the colonial and modern spaces into the historical context which is their shared horizon. As we will see in our discussion of the figure of Imperial Man, this process of consumption and accumulation, and the structures of power and knowledge that buttress it, produce a normative form of humanity that is Western, white, and male. As Sylvia Wynter argues, what emerged from these breakthroughs as they decomposed and recomposed the old order of European society on a world scale was a “new relation to Nature and other men, [which] metamorphosed Western man and his sense of self” as “for the first time in human history a small group of peoples now had at their disposal the rest of the peoples and resources of the earth” even as this new relationship was naturalized and justified in relation to abstract truths unfolding the universal progress of history (Sociopoetics 82).

Thus, when two cultures meet, their entanglements across their historical autonomous developments can be understood as a form of structural coupling. However, in the modern/colonial world system, this is done in a relationship in which one autonomous unity is dominated and consumed by the other, a process of what I would like to call, highlighting its material and biologically embodied basis, colonial consumption. The process of colonial consumption can be thought of in terms similar to Ann Laura Stoler's work on ruination: “Ruination is an act perpetrated, a condition to which one is subject, and a cause of loss. Each has its own temporality. Each identifies different durations and moments of exposure to a range of violences and degradations that may be immediate or delayed, subcutaneous or visible, prolonged or instant, diffuse

or direct” (Stoler, 11). Ruination provides a way of connecting and thinking through different moments and modalities of the same process. Furthermore, she argues that this is a dynamic process, as “our focus is less on the noun ruin than on ‘ruination’ as an active, ongoing process that allocates imperial debris differentially and ruin as a violent verb that unites apparently disparate moments, places, and objects” (7). By tying colonial consumption to ruination, I wish to expand its conceptual range by seeing it not as a static relation between two fixed points, but as a dynamic interaction of flows and structures through which an unequal relationship is established that strengthens one party while ruining the other, and in doing so turns the colonized into disposable material for the West’s own project of accumulation and progress. Ruination as a concept thus allows us to see colonial consumption as a joining of two seemingly distinct and opposed logics: that of Eurocentric modernity and that of colonization as a structural coupling which produces a shared world through colonial consumption.

It is from within this understanding of colonial consumption that I will now turn to an examination of the conceptual core of modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. First, key to understanding decoloniality is a critique of the ‘rhetoric of Modernity’ that has been, by and large, the dominant way of understanding and legitimizing the global order of modernity/coloniality. This rhetoric can be thought through three interrelated concepts: salvation, universal history, and the view from nowhere. As I explore the meaning that these concepts have for modernity, they will begin in their very elaboration to point toward the underlying structure of coloniality that organizes the modern/colonial world-system.

The concept of salvation is essential to the constitution and legitimation of the modern/colonial world system. It is via the concept of salvation that Western colonial-capitalist ways of knowing and doing are able to present themselves as objective truth, as a model at the forefront of the progressive advancement of humanity and that necessarily must be followed by all others in their own cultural and social evolution towards the truth such that “coloniality [is] justified as the unavoidable necessity to modernize the world” (Further Thoughts 25). As Mignolo argues, this concept has had many forms over the years, successively changing as the basis of the West’s self-conception itself evolved

from “the rhetoric of Christianization, civilization, progress, development, [to] market democracy” (Delinking 317). This rhetoric was examined by Manning Marable as central to his understanding of the process of Western economic development in relation to third-world underdevelopment, as it supplied “the pattern by which nonwhite people transform themselves” through commercialization and industrialization, “moving toward the standard socioeconomic models provided by Western Europe and the United States” (2-3). Modernity/coloniality/decoloniality build on this economic base to assert that with the socioeconomic model comes an overall model of epistemic-political normativity. Thus, “‘modernity’ is a complex narrative whose point of origin was Europe; a narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, ‘coloniality.’ Coloniality in other words is constitutive of modernity” even as modernity is narrativized as a promise of salvation (Darker 2-3).

This narrative, of central importance to the rhetoric of salvation, was formalized through creation of a unilinear history, and Mignolo argues that “the colonization of time and the institution of the temporal colonial difference were crucial for the narratives of modernity as salvation, emancipation and progress” (Delinking 324). This linear model of time, grounding itself in an appropriation of Greek and Roman antiquity, extends “roughly from the sixteenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century” and ends with “the building of modernity” (Local 50). In this linear view, colonialism forms the past of the modern world, a series of relationships that have been transcended, whether justly or not. This unilinear model of time is one in which “time was conceived and naturalized as both the measure of human history (modernity) and the time-scale of human beings (primitives) in their distance with modernity” (153). History thus emerges as the colonization of time, as a means of translating the original differences between religious cultures in Christianity to the articulation of these differences as values within a unitary concept of progressive history. As a global culture, this meant that “History as ‘time’ entered into the picture to place societies in an imaginary chronological line going from nature to culture, from barbarism to civilization following a progressive destination to some point of arrival” (151). Ultimately, the unilinear construction of time creates “a comparative point of view that allows for the erasure or devaluation of other forms of knowledge” (172).

The result of this historical narrative of modernity as salvation and the comparative view it instantiates is a political-epistemic construction of knowledge production as a detached process that is about the world, a form of control that is called 'the hubris of the zero point'. This results in a view of humanity in which some ways of knowing and doing are valued as normative representations of universal being while others come to signify those 'left behind' by history, those who need to be redeemed by the rhetoric of modernity. The view from nowhere emerges from the subject of this universal history as the pure subject of abstract universal knowledge; it is the construction of a subject that is modern, thus saved by and furthering the myth of unitary history. Ramon Grosfoguel argues that the hubris of the zero point as a model of subjectivity was codified with Descartes and is built on solipsism and a dualism that separated the mind, a transcendent reason, from the body, profane matter (Grosfoguel, 88). This creates the concept of a universality "in which the epistemic subject has no sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, class, spirituality, language, or epistemic location within power relations, and a subject that produces truth from an interior monologue with himself without relation to anyone outside him." (89). This universality is the epistemic loci of enunciation that was exported through modernity as the only viable point from which knowledge could be organized, legitimizing and obscuring its entanglements with relations of coloniality. As we shall see momentarily, this entanglement was one of violence, and the ability to present knowledge as de-localized, universal, abstract is tied to social-historical processes of domination.

For now however, we must see that the result of the rhetoric of modernity is a split between different human subjects in an unequal structural coupling. On the one side are those who are the subjects of universal history and salvation, the producers of universal knowledge. These are whom Mignolo calls *humanitas*: "those who manage categories of thought and knowledge production to use that managerial authority to assert themselves by disqualifying those who...are classified as deficient, rationally and ontologically" (Darker 82). Those others, cast out from history and in need of salvation are the *anthropos* "who at once are barbarians and traditional" barred from universal history and the ability to have their ways of knowing and doing validated as truth (82). Similarly, Sylvia Wynter places this relationship within what she calls the current

economic-biocentric conception of Man that relies on a “systemically - including epistemically - produced role of ‘otherness’” to produce a naturalized, biologically absolute, genre of humanity in which some (Western) forms of knowing and doing are overrepresented at the expense of others whose exploitation and domination are justified (Ceremony Found 196). It is important to note that while both Mignolo and Wynter’s conceptions of this relationship are grounded in the universe of meaning that is modernity/coloniality/decoloniality, they do so from different perspectives, different histories of structural coupling. On the one hand, Mignolo, writing from South America, has taken up the majority of his theorizing from the perspectives and histories of the Spanish conquest and Amerindian resistance; hence his formulation of the relationship between *humanitas* and *anthropos* in terms of tradition understood as a static cultural practice, as this was the means by which the Spanish differentiated themselves from the Indigenous nations in order to justify their colonial projects. Conversely, writing from Jamaica in relation to histories of slavery and the Black radical tradition, Wynter formulates the relationship between Western man and others through the biosocial construction of race as an ordering of humanity that posits a norm via its maintenance of a liminal space beyond which humanity is no more. In other words, Blackness as the abject base against which the West’s genre of the human defines its normativity. What is important in each case, however, is that the relationship between these genres of the human be conceived as forms of structural coupling which I have termed colonial consumption, and which deny the autopoietic autonomy of subjects whose knowing and doing are grounded in the construction of shared worlds. In reaching this point however, where we can begin to see the ways in which the views advanced by the rhetoric of modernity are grounded in concrete relations of domination, we have begun to move toward the next key concept, that of the logic of coloniality.

The key concept tying together the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality is the colonial matrix of power, first theorized by Anibal Quijano and then taken up by Mignolo and others. According to Mignolo: “I would venture to say that the four interrelated spheres of the colonial matrix of power (economy, authority, gender and sexuality, and knowledge/subjectivity) operate at the level of the enunciated, while patriarchy and racism ground the enunciation in both actors and institutions” (Darker

Side124). At the level of the enunciated these domains are “interrelated spheres of management and control” that constitute the world order through their development of knowledge in service of colonial consumption (8). These domains are supported by “the racial and patriarchal foundation of knowledge (the enunciation)” which structure the coupling of diverse communities in the modern/colonial world (8). This means that “knowledge is not just something that accounts for (describes, narrates, explains, interprets) and allows the knower to sit outside the observed domain” but “that *knowledge itself is an integral part of imperial processes of appropriation*” (205, emphasis in original). As a form of structural coupling between autopoietic unities, “the colonial matrix of power is built and operates on a series of interconnected heterogeneous historico-structural nodes, bounded by the ‘/’ that divides and unites modernity/coloniality, imperial laws/colonial rules, center/peripheries, that are the consequences of global linear thinking in the foundation of the modern/colonial world” (Darker 16-17). As we have seen, the colonial matrix of power orders humanity on a hierarchical system from civilized humanitas to barbaric anthropos, incorporating through structural coupling alternative forms of life into its self-organization in a way that legitimizes and naturalizes a world organized by and for colonial consumption while obstructing the autopoietic autonomy of those it incorporates.

From the colonial matrix of power emerges the next important decolonial concept, that of the colonial difference. First theorized by Mignolo, the colonial difference refers to the divide between modernity and coloniality that is instituted by colonial consumption. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues, the colonial difference occurs at different levels, that of knowledge and that of being. The colonial difference in terms of knowledge concerns the election of Western ways of knowing the world to the status of universal truth, in which European history and life ways become the transcendental horizon from which all meaning must be articulated. It is important to realize that not only does this subalternize alternative ways of knowing, but it in fact contributes to the objectification of the communities who practice these alternative forms of knowledge production, fitting them into a world order of knowledge controlled by Western designs. The colonial difference is the means by which the ways of being in the centre are distanced and held as distinct and superior to those in the periphery while concealing

their interrelatedness. As Walter Mignolo argues “until the middle of the twentieth century the colonial difference honoured the classical distinction that was valid for early forms of colonialism” of center-periphery (Local xxv). With the expansion of global capitalism however, Mignolo posits a global colonialism that “keeps on reproducing the colonial difference on a world scale, although without being located in one particular nation-state” (xxvi). Further, this is supported by and in turn supports the asymmetrical nature of global designs, that is, that knowledge is produced in socio-historical and political-epistemic contexts that “responded to the needs of the First not of the Third World” (Darker 129). The colonial difference of knowledge highlights the practices of knowing that contribute to and justify the autopoietic production of a society formed by the structural coupling of autonomous unities within the logic of colonality. Thus “although knowledge-making is a common human endeavour...the racialization of places and people in the formation and transformation of the colonial matrix of power not only established hierarchical ranking between languages and categories of thought, but also built economic and political structures of domination and oppression based on the geopolitical and hierarchical organization of knowledge” (141).

Coloniality is related not only to knowledge, but to the bodies that produce those knowledges as well: “coloniality of power, in a nutshell, worked as an epistemic mechanism that classified people around the world...by colour and territories, and managed (and still manages) the distribution of labour and the organization of society” for Western projects of accumulation via colonial consumption (Darker 216). As a result, “in the colonial matrix of power such classifications are bestowed on bodies, in a combination of racism and patriarchy” that takes the European male as its basis (318-9). This body is sustained by systems of violent domination that renders other forms of life, other embodied ways of knowing and living together in the world, vulnerable to the point of disposability, unlivable and unthinkable. Through the colonial matrix of power’s structuring of discourses and material relations, certain bodies are produced as invisible or hyper-visible, disposable and vulnerable, incapable of translating their experience into knowledge, or of exercising any form of agency that is not derivative of their assimilative performance of dominant practices of autopoiesis. According to Maldonado-Torres “coloniality of Being refers to...the production of a world in which exceptions to ethical

relationships become the norm” (Coloniality 113). Importantly, “that being has a colonial aspect means that in addition to positing itself as autonomous and being driven by preservation, it tries to obliterate the traces” of its unequal structural coupling “by actually giving birth to a world in which lordship and supremacy rather than generous interaction define social dynamics” (113).

The subject of this social dynamic, the subject of colonial consumption and the autopoietic production of humanity in modernity/coloniality, I will call Imperial Man. What this figure does is tie the hubris of the zero point as the loci of enunciation of the subject produced by the coloniality of knowledge, to the history of colonialism, conquest, and genocide that made up the process of colonial consumption as a structural coupling. Thus, Imperial Being is the subject whose power, agency, and worldview are based on processes of colonial consumption, and yet who is able to displace and legitimize the unequal aspect of this reality through a universal reason that negates all other ways of knowing and being. In the end, from the material-symbolic production of a specific normative body emerges reality in which the human is “now reified into a commodity” dependent on the mediation of its agency by structures of domination and the narratives of transcendent history that justify them (Socio-Poetics 87). This connection between the socio-historical aspects of violent domination and the political-epistemic relations arising from it within the logic of coloniality is important, as it ties knowledge production and language to both the body and violence. Recognizing this, Maldonado-Torres argues that, as a concept, “coloniality of being would make primary reference to the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language” (Coloniality 96).

This relationship of the body to language, violence and community, returns us to Maturana and Varela’s biological and social understanding of cognition, a recognition that can, with reference to the work of Mignolo and Lewis Gordon, work to bring us to the place of poetics in decoloniality, and its relationship to autopoiesis. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2010) Mignolo puts forth his basic model of the decolonial subject’s relation to knowledge production, building on the work of Emile Benveniste. Mignolo begins by affirming Benveniste’s formal apparatus of enunciation, which starts with the distinction between the enunciator and the enunciated; it is then formed on the



basis of the pronominal system of language and the spatial deitics or markers that structure the enunciation in relation to a specifically positioned enunciator. Then, “the extension of linguistic theory and analysis from the sentence to discourse prompted the introduction of discursive frames or conversation frames” that, when given formal and institutional mediation can become ‘scholarly disciplines’ that organize and regulate knowledge production within specific cosmologies (124-5). Ultimately, “the linguistic institutional foundation, management, and practices that knowledge-making brings allows [Mignolo] to extend Benveniste’s formal apparatus of enunciation...focusing on the borders between the Western..foundation of knowledge and understanding...and its confrontation with knowledge-making in non-European languages and institutions” (126). In this context education and the management of knowledge take on a specific importance as “institutions are created that accomplish two functions: training the new (epistemically obedient) members, and controlling who enters and what knowledge-making is allowed, disavowed, devalued, or celebrated” (141). All knowledge production is thus formed from embodied subjects in relation to larger institutional structures of knowledge that legitimize and reproduce founding cosmologies, mediated through socio-linguistic practices.

Important to make sense of Mignolo’s larger structure of the body within cosmology as the locus of enunciation for decolonial thought, which seeks to position that thought outside of the institutionalized bounds of coloniality, is the concept of disciplinary decadence. Disciplinary decadence is a concept advanced by Lewis R. Gordon as a way of critiquing forms of knowing that merely describe the world through a set of fixed disciplinary norms which, over time, have become separated from the body as a grounding in social reality. While we shall see in subsequent chapters what replaces this stagnant view of the body-knowledge relation in decolonial theory - namely the notion of knowledge as grounded in the body and community as autopoietic systems in continual processes of translation and transformation - for now I will simply explore Gordon’s concept and how it relates to coloniality. Disciplinary decadence, Gordon argues, “is the ontologizing or reification of a discipline....Its assertion as absolute eventually leads to no room for other disciplinary perspectives, the result of which is the rejection of them for not being one’s own” (4-5). This leads to two consequences, one on the level of the

subject and one on the level of knowledge production itself. On the level of the subject Gordon argues that “in such an attitude, we treat our discipline as though it was never born and has always existed and will never change or, in some cases, die. More than immortal, it is eternal. Yet as something that came into being, it lives, in such an attitude, as a monstrosity” (4). This projection of an immortal, ungrounded knowledge, an abstract knowledge that occurs ‘out there’ with no connection to living society is thus the manifestation of the zero-point of knowledge as projected by a coloniality of being that seeks to deny the social basis of humanity. Indeed, as Gordon further argues “what disappears is the possibility of a shared public space, a world outside the self” (6). In the denial of shared space and the valorization of a form of knowing and doing that is abstract and eternal, disciplinary decadence is thus the institutionalized thought of Imperial Man. The effect for knowledge production is that “if one’s discipline has foreclosed the question of its scope, all that is left for it is a form of ‘applied’ work. Such work militates against thinking” (5). More than that, I would argue, such work militates against thinking in the name of the construction of restrictive forms of knowing and doing that uphold colonial consumption. This is because, as a denial of social reality, disciplinary decadence is not merely solipsistic for the knower, but, since “the performative contradiction in denying social reality is that ‘denial’ is communicative, is outward directed, even where the reference is to the self...in other words, a social rejection of the social” in the name of a restrictive human nature it “leads to the notion of law like structures on human action before such actions are made” (18). When these structures are grounded in the maintenance of coloniality, what emerges is the coloniality of knowledge and being as the body is related to knowledge through its denial of social embodiment in the name of the abstract truth of Imperial Man.

Importantly, the colonial difference on the levels of both being and knowledge allow us to articulate a relationship between embodied experience, social organization via structural couplings, and knowledge production so as to understand with Mignolo that “facts and events have meaning once they are incorporated into universes of meaning and universes of meaning cross the body” (Further Thoughts 26). That is, as Vallega argues, there is an aesthetic dimension to modernity/coloniality that not only orders bodies in their relations, but in their internalized dispositions. Noting that, in modernity/coloniality,

“living desire becomes the function of the production and preservation of power within the system” leaving no room for other forms of life, Vallega argues that the aesthetic emerges as a field of struggle in which the dispositions and sensibilities that normalize domination can be questioned and transformed (71). This is not, he claims, a call to irrationality, but to link knowledge production and political projects to the “living manifestations of distinct peoples” as a way of being attentive to “the time-space that must be constantly recovered for the sake of the expression, transformation, and opening to the potentiality of our communities” (73). In an online article co-written with Rolando Vasquez, Mignolo charts how the aesthetic, via cultural production, can also achieve a state of disciplinary decadence, arguing that “modern aestheTics have played a key role in configuring a canon, a normativity that enabled the disdain and the rejection of other forms of aesthetic practices, or, more precisely, other forms of aestheSis, of sensing and perceiving” (Mignolo and Vasquez). The spread of aesthetics as a global concept was tied to processes that devalued other ways of being and sensing: “modern aestheTics have served as a mechanism to produce and regulate sensibilities” (ibid). In this way, knowledge and art, literature and language, became separated from their grounding within localized European autonomies to become abstract means of thinking about and representing the world. And, within the emerging modern/colonial world system an abstract commodified culture tied to the disciplinary decadence of Imperial Man became “the agent and product of the process by which objects invent man as another object labeled human [and] Man’s power to name objects is turned against him” thereby removing people’s agency to transform their material-symbolic existence into a legitimized form of knowing and constructing community (Socio-Poetics 87).

Against this, decoloniality advocates a form of knowing from/with the body. This is a form of knowing that would take seriously Gordon’s assertion that “the human is, in other words, lived, and it is creatively so” (Disciplinary 18). In this frame, one would acknowledge that “disciplines are functions of the living reality on which they rest, namely, living societies. As social conditions for the life of disciplines decline, so, too, do disciplines” (8). Against stagnation Gordon advocates “the lived reality of thinking as reflective thought on thinkers and thought...the task of making thinking a living activity often requires acts of disruption” (6). Following from this, Wynter proposes poetry as

“the agent and product by which man names the world, and calling it into being, invents his human as opposed to his ‘natural’ being” as an “active relation” (Socio-poetics 87). It is this conception of poetics as an active, embodied activity, an expression of living thought grounded in the body and in the recovery or valorization of ways of life as the grounds of knowledge production, that I will now take up through the concept of an insurgent poetics, wherein the poem is seen as a production of autopoiesis capable of articulating a structural coupling disruptive of the logic of coloniality.

As John Beverley argues “literature used in this way can serve as a kind of ‘contact zone’ where previously disarticulated subject positions, social projects, and energies may come together” (Beverley xiii). For José Rabasa, this contact zone is thought of as an “insurgent aesthetics [which] calls for the smashing of everything sacred without invoking an end” (Rabasa 261). Rabasa goes on to argue that “the spirit of insurgency in which there is endless invention of new forms of expression” can ground poetics such that “we ought to think of insurgencies as carrying deep transformations in the common sense of a given class, society, historical moment, or culture” (263, 279). Rabasa’s argument that “we ought to think aesthetics as a pure domain - the ought is not simply a moral injunction but a revolutionary ethos” becomes a form reading poetics as a contact zone that suspends hegemonic formations to point to new orders of humanity and rationality (263). Thus “the immanence of struggles constitutes their singularity and necessary specificity” (99). This immanence, when concretized in the poem as a contact zone, functions as a “field force which reinterprets and reinvents anew the meaning of the sign; that is, the poem creates anew the sign” (Socio-Poetics 88). Ultimately, an insurgent poetics functions as an autopoietic act in language such that “to name, to create a sign, is to conceptualize, to draw into a universe of meaning” the embodied experience of the writer and the reader in a poem “created as a new cultural form as an accusation against cultural destitution, and as the dynamic of revolt” (88-9). Against the attribution of agency to Imperial Man as a representative of History or Truth, Wynter’s call for socio-poetics as a means of finding alternative ways of making ourselves human, of drawing language, including our linguistic constructions of the self, into new cosmologies, functions to focus on agency as a result of humanity’s hybrid being as *logos* and *bios*. In doing so, the naturalized process of colonial consumption is disrupted by an insurgent

poetics, though what will take its place is up to the structural coupling and autopoietic self-organization of the participants.

My foray into decolonial poetics will thus take up this model of the poem as an insurgent contact zone, that challenges the reader from a concrete positionality, fracturing his or her disciplinary assumptions while pointing to the articulation of difficult solidarities. Thus, in this insurgent moment there occurs “the confrontation through the text of one person (the reader and/or the interlocutor) with another at the level of a possible solidarity and unity (a unity in which differences will be respected)” (Beverley 80). Thus, the poem as autopoietic structural coupling “involves a series of negotiations between different subject positions and their legitimizing discourses” (104). A key question that will emerge in my discussion of decolonial poetics then is this: what can be gained in seeing poetry as an autopoietic practice outside of, or at least destabilizing of, its disciplinary formation. That is, how can poetics as an embodied practice of “making ourselves human” help to conceive of knowledge production as a form of thinking from/with rather than for/about?

This concept of the poem as an insurgent form of knowing and doing, a thinking from/with rather than about, is important for several reasons. First, in positioning the poet as a concrete subject, who constructs the poem as a transformation of their world into a linguistic act, poetry can be seen in terms of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls a “rearguard theory” grounded in the “experiences of large, marginalized minorities and majorities that struggle against unjustly imposed marginality and inferiority, with the purpose of strengthening their resistance” (Sousa Santos ix). Secondly, in the poem’s need to interpellate its reader into a relationship in the shared construction of meaning, a mode of thinking with, posits knowing and doing as a poetic cum autopoietic activity, as meaning is constructed in the coupling between the worlds of the reader and the poet through the poem without the possibility of referring to any transcendent, abstract truth that would fix the play of meaning. Finally, from this, any pretensions on the reader’s part to the hubris of the zero point are destabilized, and they are asked to engage in an ethical relation to the world that the poem seeks to transform. What emerges is “a frame in which literary practice will not be conceived as an object of study (aesthetic, linguistic,

or sociological) but as production of theoretical knowledge; not as ‘representation’ of something, society or ideas, but as a reflection in its own way about issues of human and historical concern, including language” (Local 223). From the poem itself, as a linguistic act turned object, emerges an articulation of poetics as a means of thinking from/with, grounding knowledge production as an autopoietic activity on a global scale within the frame of decoloniality. Thus, poetics is neither science nor theory, but a practice producing worlds outside of, or in excess to, the coherence of Imperial Man.

I will now give a brief overview of the following chapters. First, I will turn to the poetry and thought of Aimé Césaire in order to examine the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject. Starting from the history of colonialism and slavery in the Caribbean I will read Césaire in relation to Cedric Robinson’s Black radical tradition and the way in which Césaire engages the embodied experience of Blackness. Turning to Mignolo’s concept of the geo- and bio- politics of knowledge, I will argue that the decolonial subject rests on an understanding of the human as *bios* and *logos* that creatively exceeds the structures of knowledge in the modern/colonial world in an act of thinking from the Black body.

In the second chapter I will look to Chilean poet Cecilia Vicuña and the space of the border as the site from which decoloniality enacts a metacritique of reason. Looking to the ways in which space is actualized by social-political organizations as an autopoietic field, I will argue that modernity/coloniality works by instituting an abstract space that subsumes localities to the need of colonial consumption. Against forms of cultural governance which seek to solidify this process, I will look to the space of the border as a space in which bodies are placed in proximity and directed toward their co-human need to sustain alternative forms of life as a mode of thinking with those in the border.

In the third chapter I will look to Mohawk poet Beth Brant and the possibility of a decolonial ethics of political liberation. Looking towards the way in which settler-colonialism structures its autopoietic field through a politics of recognition, I will argue that this unitary view can be destabilized via a politics of address. In doing so I will argue

that the poem should be understood as a decolonial gift inviting the reader into a relationship of thinking from/with the colonized and towards political liberation.

Finally, I will end with a short conclusion that will summarize the way in which poetics is able to link the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject, the metacritique of reason in the space of the border, and the ethics of political liberation. In doing so, I will show how the decolonial option leads to the concept of pluriversality as a global space of complex solidarities.

## Aimé Césaire and the Black Caribbean: Philosophical Anthropology of the Decolonial Subject

In relation to Lewis Gordon's work on the guiding questions of decolonial thought, I understand philosophical anthropology to be a consideration of the material and symbolic intersubjective nature of humanity, and the forms of subjectivity and relation that arise therefrom. As a way of examining the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject this chapter will explore the work and thought of the Martinican poet, politician, and decolonial thinker Aimé Césaire. It will focus on poems from his book *Un Soliel Cou Coupé* (1947) as well as his essays "Calling the Magician: A Few Words on Caribbean Civilization" (1944) and "Poetry and Knowledge" (1945) originally printed in the journal *Tropiques*, as well as *Discours sur le Colonialism* (1950). From these examples I will argue that Césaire opens up knowledge via poetics as a means of thinking from the Black Caribbean as a political-epistemic subject embodied in the experiences of slavery and colonialism yet moving toward the horizon of decoloniality. Drawing on Walter Dignolo's concept of the geo- and body- politics of knowledge, I will show that in order to respond to the needs and desires of colonized and racialized communities in a way that articulates and cultivates agency, knowledge production must be understood as part of an autopoietic practice of knowing and doing grounded in the concrete relationality of bodies - both in their positionality within the modern/colonial world system and their communal desires for decolonization. An exploration of these tendencies will come via the themes of sterility and excess, death and rebirth, in Césaire's poetry. The ways in which he connects these thematic tensions within the historical and political reality of the Caribbean, and the everyday experiences of the Black body - both as it is constructed as an object via colonial dominance and as the locus of autonomous agency - and the complex images by which he seeks to transform this reality, will act as a guide leading us through the concrete construction of the decolonial subject in relation to the hybrid being of humanity as both *bios* and *logos*. Knowledge is thus brought into a new relation to power, which is premised upon collective needs rather than the abstract production of the universal 'zero-point' manifested as Imperial Man.



The poems that I will be examining are collected in the original printing of *Soleil cou coupé* from 1948, recently edited and translated by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman (2011). The date of this collection is significant in several respects. First, it is printed just a year after Césaire had helped bring into existence the 1946 law that transformed Martinique into an overseas department of France, a move meant to achieve decolonization in the form of political equality within the institutional structure of the French Republic. It was at this time, argues Nick Nesbitt, that Césaire's concerns, and their reflection in his poetry and essays, were "drawn between a reflexive celebration of blackness...and the ultra-leftism of a Surrealist politics, a politics limited...to the throwing of cultural 'bombs,' without any clear procedure for the development of a militant Negritude of universal....scope" (104). The means of this development would appear in the years after, and "as early as 1949...Césaire took the crucial step beyond departmentalization [when]...in a July 11 speech, he affirmed the existence of a Martinican national consciousness" (107). This was marked, Nesbitt argues, by a shift from "the cosmogonic Surrealism that had characterized his creative production during the immediate post-war years" to "an anticolonial socialist realism" of tropical specificity after the 1950's (117). Key to this shift is the publication of his *Discours sur colonialism* in 1950. Importantly, *Soleil cou coupé* was subsequently heavily edited by Césaire, many poems being removed and others rearranged "to bring them in to line with the political aims of the blended collection *Cadastre* (1961)" as a part of this shift (Soleil xiii).

However, it would be incorrect to see this shift in focus as a decisive and irrevocable break for Césaire's work and poetics. Rather, what I want to focus on is the articulation of Césaire's two concerns: a self-reflexive examination of colonized and racialized experience in the Black Caribbean, and a universal politics of Third-world communism manifesting as anti-colonial liberation; that is, a practice of epistemology and politics, identity and liberation, yoked together by an embodied poetics. Césaire's effort to articulate the subjective and the political, embodied and intellectual, via the medium of poetry forms a link between early essays such as "Poetry and Knowledge" (1945) and his later *Discours sur colonialism*. Key to this, as mentioned above, is his commitment, after the failure of departmentalization, towards an emerging Martinican national consciousness, decisive in his shift from a politics of inclusion in colonial

organizations of power to one of autonomy. I would like to argue that, although, as Nesbitt states, *Soleil cou coupé* marks the end of his early ‘cosmogonic Surrealism,’ it nonetheless attends to this shift towards and beyond national consciousness as a point of confrontation with coloniality and represents, thereby, a grounding moment of decolonial poetics in which the absence of racialized experience in the Western model of the human is confronted and translated into a point of excess from which springs a new horizon of meaning. Thus, the poems allow us to grasp the entanglement of the political and the epistemic in decoloniality, and the practice of humanity that this entanglement concretizes.

Many of Césaire’s poems gravitate on a thematic relation between images of putrefaction or sterility and an uncontrollable fecundity, resolving this tension in a dynamic form that points toward possibilities of fulfillment. For instance, “Redemption” begins as “the loud noise gravitates rotten with cargo / wormy and bright disaster” invoking the history of slave ships and the human misery that they encased (27). The poem continues in a parallel image: “the loud noise gravitates meninx of diamonds / your face glides into my milky frenzy”. Thus, the human cargo of the slave ship is, for those who own the ships, tied to the production of value via the labor which will be the enslaved body’s entrance into the modern/colonial world system as the basis of a colonial consumption that produces fulfillment for the metropole at the expense of the Black bodies in the colonies. However, the connection between their dehumanization and capitalist valuation, manifested in the parallel construction of the image of the cargo and meninx of diamonds, is destabilized by the naked confrontation between the poet and the face of the other. And indeed, the poem ends with an injunction to “swelter crude radiance / in the very slow nakedness of my hand / virgin umbilicus of the earth” which opposes the ‘crude radiance’ of a new relation with the earth to the previous construction of colonial fulfillment via the Black death of colonial consumption. Thus, for Césaire, the formal and symbolic structures of this poem, and others, revolve around the specific position of Black bodies, their violent entrance into modernity/coloniality, and the possibilities of alternative forms of human fulfillment. The opposition between sterility and fecundity then, is not so much one of abstract universal states, but of embodied

experiences that are tied to larger political-epistemic projects that order the world of the Black Caribbean.

The Caribbean island of Martinique was ‘discovered’ by Columbus in 1502 and colonized by the French in 1635, an event that marked the beginning of the extermination of the island’s Indigenous inhabitants. It also marked the entrance of the island into the Atlantic slave trade as the site of “the slave-based plantation system centred around sugar production” (Richardson 16). Its entrance into the modern/colonial world-system, which Césaire formalizes in his work, is thus built on the entwined moments of genocide and enslavement that rendered its land and people raw materials for the processes of colonial consumption by which the French metropole accumulated wealth and power, and by which a racial-class hierarchy on the island was formed. This status as colonial resource structured its relationship with Europe up to the time of Césaire’s writing and beyond, affecting the development of the island politically, economically, and culturally. Even abolition in 1848, which granted nominal freedom, and thus humanity, to the enslaved, was granted by France rather than seized. For Edouard Glissant this distinction is important as the proclamation of 31 March 1848 was a document that structured freedom as a state conferred on the colonized at the convenience of the colonizer, with little to no recognition of the injustice of slavery or of continuing neocolonial relations. The humanity of the enslaved was given as a response to the needs of the French, and the proclamation was but “the thinly veiled declaration of our alienation” that maintained the colonial relation of Black sterility and colonial fulfillment mentioned above (Glissant 27). Indeed, what began as colonization, followed by a thinly veiled dependency, became, with the island’s choosing to become an overseas department in 1946, what can be best described as a process of assimilation.

The ideology of assimilation is key to the French colonial myth by which it presented (and presents) itself as “responsive to aspirations of the colonial peoples for integration into the body politic of the ‘mother country’, making this integration an element of their colonial policy” (Richardson 1). By insisting on a cultural, rather than biological, based form of racism, in which local cultures were seen as lagging behind French modernity, “it was made clear to black people in the French colonies, in no

uncertain terms, that their only salvation lay in renouncing their own cultural traditions and embracing those of the white masters” (3). In spite of this ideology however, the post-slavery period continued to show “Martinique [as] dependent politically, economically, and even culturally on France” while the unending process of assimilation provides coherence and legitimation of French cultural superiority, which can be seen by turning briefly to the Black middle class (17).

As slavery came to an end and there were increasing opportunities for individual advancement, there formed a Black middle class who integrated themselves, however imperfectly, precariously, and warily, into the dominant worldview. As René Ménéil observes, “in colonized lands, ideas for the natives to adopt that are suited to the effective exploitation of the conquered territory arrive along with the soldiers, administrators, tools and police” as “it is very useful for a European if the colonized person’s thought exactly harmonizes with colonialist views or, more exactly, serves them” (50). Thus, a “coincidence of feeling” emerges in which, lacking the burden of their own historical experience, the Caribbean subject comes to exist in “an unreal realm determined by another people’s abstract and ideal forms” (50-1). That is, they are taught to reflexively experience themselves according to the terms of coherence for Western Imperial Man, rejecting Blackness as inferior to or outside of this coherence. This results in an intellectual and creative denial of the body, reflected in the social and cultural sterility that Césaire diagnoses in his work, and what emerges from the alienated Caribbean writer is “a literature that lacks energy... without attachment to the flesh” (52). This leads, Césaire argues, to a state of “thingification”, in which the colonized and racialized body is reduced to a form of fallen matter, able to be overcome only insofar as the individual is able to perform an assimilative adherence to French cultural norms, which are in turn sustained by the massive exploitation of the Caribbean colonies turned Overseas Departments (Discourse 43). In other words, a philosophical anthropology is advanced in the colonial situation that maps onto the model advanced last chapter via the work of Mignolo and Wynter: one in which the human is idealized according to the overrepresentation of Imperial Man as a universal norm that marks all others as deficient, convoking them in a liminal relationship of colonial consumption via a denial of sociality where “there is no human contact, but relations of domination and submission” (42). It is

the reattachment of thought to the flesh that Césaire seeks via his poetics as an opening to a new decolonial subject.

This relation of the violence of colonization to knowledge can be seen in the poem “Solid” (49). In the poem, Césaire finds that “the plumb line of gravity having been installed at the facile bottom of solidity” there is a state of complete stasis, as “nothing up to and including the sun that has not stopped...The world is fixed. Stone is fixed.” Furthermore, this fixity carries with it an “immense false movement” that gives the appearance of truth. Against this, the poet raises a series of images of life and death, culminating in an injunction that “Face of man you shall not budge”. Yet, this is not a compromise with the forces of stagnation, but rather an ironic reversal, as the face of man is “caught in the ferocious coordinates of my wrinkles” and thus contained not in the supposedly eternal abstract truth of “the plumb line of gravity” and its “false movement” of progress, but rather in the embodied experience of the poet as he ages. Thus, the opposition between states of sterility and creative excess that Césaire uses to formally organize his poetics as a means of critique and revitalization, are here joined to the specific production of knowledge as a means of stabilizing the world. In such a system, the poet’s own aging body calls into question the fixity of the world as it is constructed by colonial consumption around the figure of Imperial Man as the organizing point of coherence. In insisting on an embodied confrontation with this system, Césaire rests his decolonization on thinking from the embodied existence of Blackness that focuses on the system of knowledge and colonial consumption as the problem, rather than seeing the communities of the Black Caribbean as ‘problem people’.

Recall in my discussion of Lewis Gordon’s concept of disciplinary decadence, how he described an immortal, unchanging discipline as a “monstrosity”. What does this mean exactly? It is connected to his understanding of such disciplines reducing thought to a form of applied work, functioning simply to control and classify the world according to the supposedly universal needs of the disciplinary subject. It becomes monstrous because of the relations that such forms of disciplinary thought can justify and create, such as Césaire’s concept of ‘thingification’. That is, when the discipline, in its application, creates a situation in which only certain experiences are rendered knowable and

communicable, only certain bodies made viable as points of coherence from which the world can be known and autonomously organized. This validation of only certain modes of knowing reflects what Miranda Fricker calls epistemic injustice, explored in her work *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing* (2007). Fricker argues that epistemic injustice results when social groups possess asymmetrical access to power and are able to structure the material and epistemological resources of society for their own benefit (147). This means that one group has an “unfair advantage in structuring collective social understandings” (147). Fricker further notes that epistemic injustice can obtain in regards to both the content - not having the means of articulating an experience properly - and the form of what can be said - being unable to express their experience in a way considered meaningful (160). This creates a relationship of “situated hermeneutical inequality...such that the subject is rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which it is particularly in his or her interest to be able to render intelligible” (162). Thus, certain communities are left out of the general production of knowledge, and thereby placed in positions in which they are at a disadvantage in terms of their ability to act on and transform their experience. This leads to a system of knowledge in which “the whole engine of collective social meaning [is] effectively geared to keeping these obscured experiences out of sight” so as to ensure the smooth functioning of knowledge production in relation to the unequal material structuring of society (53).

The result, returning to Gordon, “is the notion of ‘problem people,’ people who disrupt the system” (Disciplinary 40). These are people who have been in some way excluded from, yet remain within, the system. In a situation of disciplinary decadence and epistemic injustice, in which sociality is denied in the name of epistemic purity, they become not a problem with the system of knowledge, a problem produced by that system, but a problem to be solved by that system - through assimilation or liquidation. This ‘solving’ is a form of political-epistemic control that produces knowledge in relation to a normative subject and social order premised on the denial of alternatives, obscuring the human social agency that constructs these peoples as problems in the first place. As Gordon argues, “the problem faced by the problem people is how to be actional. Such people live in a world in which the assertion of their humanity is structured as a contradiction of the system” (92). In order to find our way out of the epistemic injustice

of disciplinary decadence, to become ‘actional’, we will need a philosophical anthropology that is responsive to the social, to the body’s various entanglements, its histories as well as its agency. The focus, Gordon argues, should be on the questions animating the query via “a teleological suspension of disciplinarity” that “could initiate a new relationship to that discipline: one of a higher level of understanding” (44).

This teleological suspension of disciplinarity makes room for insurgent knowledges, which will allow us to see how poetics is necessary to think from rather than about the colonized, constructing them as subjects capable of their own self-reflecting rather than as problem peoples. This transformation, from thingification to autopoiesis, is the task that Césaire took for himself in his poetry and thought. The poem for Césaire functions as a political-epistemic creative act, an act of autopoiesis, that is based on a philosophical anthropology of decoloniality in order to express the being of the Black Caribbean. As Gordon argues, decoloniality “requires resisting the reduction of human subjects into problem subjects of a project of epistemic imposition...there is thus a paradox at the heart of human studies, and it is that the human being must be constituted by them while always transcending them” (126). Poetics is necessary to the creative epistemic-political work of this transcendence that is able to instantiate a human subject that pushes beyond the disciplinary bounds set by Imperial Man. Césaire’s poetry allows us to see that the hard work of thinking from the colonized is an autopoietic process within a political-epistemic project that constitutes new worlds as it comes to know itself otherwise.

However it should be noted that this aspect of the systematic production of ‘problem peoples’ attains specific features in relation to Blackness. Thus, Césaire must not only work to think from the geographic space of the Caribbean, but from the biographical fact of Blackness as well. Racism is, according to Gordon, the “denial of the humanity of a group of human beings either on the basis of race or colour” which “makes such beings a form of presence that is an absence...below the category of Otherness” in a relation of epistemic injustice as “a carefully crafted discipline of unseeing” (61). This raises problems as the Black subject attempts to negate their racialization by attempting to live in good faith via a process of assimilation, which demands that they “be good

without being critical” as “critical consciousness challenges intrasystemic consistency by raising systemic critique” (Africana 33). Thus, if the Black subject is really human, they are told, they can transcend the colonial boundaries that have been imposed and find salvation within the relationship of colonial consumption, and so assume the position of Imperial Man. However, to do so would be to live a white construct, to be other than themselves and to still be regarded as out of place, a Black performing whiteness: “In each instance, the black attempts to address a problem and encounters himself as the problem” (33). This means that, while the system relies on the production of Blackness, materially and symbolically, in order to produce a coherent normative humanity, it is nonetheless haunted by the stubborn presence of the Black body. The Black subject is offered a model of assimilation to which their failure is all but inevitable, thereby sustaining the production of a normative humanity as an imperative that requires the subjection of colonized and racialized subjects. Thus, the turn to the lived experience of Blackness, to the ways in which Black subjects have been rendered exterior to the system and stripped of any interiority, is necessary in the explication of a decolonial anthropology. This means that, within the racial hierarchy of slavery and its after-lives “white-black relations are such that blacks struggle to achieve Otherness; it is a struggle for the ethical to emerge. Thus, the circumstance is peculiarly wrought with realization of the political” (Africana 35). The political-epistemic aspect of this struggle emerges when the recognition “that the black was born out of specific circumstances reminds us that the black has not always been here and, like other human formations, may not always be among us” (36). This requires an attentiveness to Blackness that relates knowing and doing to the body, both the violence visited on it as well as its creative resistance. That is, the specificity of the slave’s experience “pushes phenomenological experience toward an understanding of a situation structurally unavailable or quite literally impossible for members of a dominant class” and this understanding is the opening towards a new humanity that destabilizes the coherence offered by Imperial Man (Nesbitt 275).

It is important to understand that this process is happening at two levels, joined in what Césaire calls ‘civilization’ as the autopoietic ordering of societies. On the one hand, from the perspective of Martinique he claims that the “Caribbean has no civilization” (Calling 120). Understanding that civilization “is a wondrous generalized communion”



Césaire thus draws a connection between a sense of alienation and lack of agency that manifests itself in social and cultural sterility centred on the production of Blackness (121). Césaire argues against this absence that “the most vital thing is to re-establish a personal, fresh, compelling, magical contact with things” and to renew the Caribbean via an embodied agency that is grounded in local autonomy (120-121). On the other hand, he also diagnoses this alienation within the world context of European capitalism and colonialism, stating that “between colonization and civilization there is an infinite distance” and that from the products of this distance “there could not come a single human value” (Discourse 34). Further arguing that this distance is the result of “humanity reduced to a monologue” Césaire thus relates the political state of domination to the epistemic production of humanity as an abstract coherence - what I have been referring to as Imperial Man (74). Against this he proposes, “a humanism made to the measure of the world” (73). The epistemic understanding of the world in the symbolic realm is thus grounded in the construction of local autonomies on the material level. What holds them all together is poetics and its role in the formation of the decolonial subject, as “poetic knowledge is that in which man spatters the object with all of his mobilized riches” (Poetry and Knowledge 145). Importantly, this is a relationship that extends beyond the dominating organization of modernity/coloniality, as it is through knowing that Césaire models the construction of the world as a relationship that is produced and maintained. Poetry, in other words, is a “vertiginous expansion” of humanity in the affective, embodied level, and poetics as a process of this self-creation on the level of language is necessary in order to articulate a political-epistemic project that can realize this expansion of concrete humanity (140). As we shall see, this is why, for Césaire and his heirs, decolonization is a “new science” that creates a climate of “poetic violence...[in which] currencies lose their value, courts cease to make judgments, judges to sentence, juries to acquit” (140-1). Césaire thus offers a poetics of insurgency in which the autopoietic self-organization of communities can disrupt the material-symbolic system of the modern/colonial world, in the process constructing the horizon of decoloniality as a political-epistemic project.

This grounding of knowledge production via poetics in Blackness can be seen in the poem “Lynch I” (7). In this poem, the violence of slavery and colonialism is

transformed and becomes the grounds for a new knowledge via Césaire's direct address to his "lynch loveable companion...on your loom a continent exploding into islands". Césaire turns the violence of the African entrance into the modern/colonial world from an absence that requires redemption to a ground from which to think, whose fulfillment in knowledge can open up a transformation of the world. And indeed, the images of lynching in the poem are multiple, exploding and work to extend beyond the bounds of Imperial reason in images of simultaneous destruction and creation: "lynch is a temple destroyed by roots and gripped by a virgin forest." It is "an entry into matter" that materializes the modern/colonial world and the entrance of the Black subject into it. It is then by attending to this pain, this history and geography of violence across the spaces of the New World, that knowledge is given an embodied relation to the construction of the world, beyond the abstract universal. As this poem shows, read in conjunction with earlier poems, it is the infliction of violence on the racialized and colonized body that performs and thus actualizes the existence of the modern/colonial order. It is the power exerted over the Black body that allows the enunciation of peace, security, and social order, which structures the agency, and self-organization of Imperial Man. A radical subjectivity forms from within Blackness that displaces the logic of dehumanization instantiated by modernity/coloniality, and Césaire's poetics structure an epistemological break as part of the larger political project of decoloniality. This larger project can be thought through the Black radical tradition as an autopoietic organization.

The Black radical tradition, as put forth by Cedric Robinson in his work *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), focuses on the emergence of specifically Black forms of thinking and doing within the modern world, grounded in an African past but shaped by the conditions of the New World and the experiences of colonialism and slavery. Basing his analysis on Karl Marx's concept of primitive accumulation, Robinson recognizes that the process of capitalist development in the modern world is tied to the appropriation of land, wealth and labour from other civilizations for the needs of Europe. Primitive accumulation in this sense is the process whereby different cultural formations are brought into contact via structural couplings that respond to the needs of Imperial Man. However, as Robinson notes, the use of African labour, their deposition in the New World, had "a consequence entirely

unintended and unanticipated by the tradesmen and ideologists of slavery” as “the cargos of the slave ships were real human beings” who carried with them “*African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs and morality*” as the terms of their humanity (173, emphasis in original). Thus, the African past was deposited in the New World, and the development of this past across the diaspora would be entangled with the development of modernity/coloniality, containing the seeds of decoloniality. In tracing the history of slave revolts, uprisings, and marronage across the New World, Robinson argues that the Black radical tradition, in resistance to slavery and colonialism, contained “*a very different and shared order of things*” (243, emphasis in original). Furthermore, he notes that this was not simply a material process, in which the slaves can be conceived of as desiring liberal forms of belonging - a conceptualization that would reaffirm the salvationist rhetoric of modernity - but was resolutely epistemological as well, such that those who resisted “lived on their terms, they died on their terms, they obtained their freedom on their terms” (245). Thus, the Black radical tradition is “the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being” (246).

Importantly, he argues that this coherency occurs outside of the racial ordering of the modern/colonial imaginary. Against a view that would see these insurrections and marronages as bounded local phenomena, geographic and historical acts that are internal to specific modern/colonial nation-states, he argues that while occurring within the cauldron of Western society, the Black radical tradition is “the makings of an essentially African response, strewn across the physical and temporal terrain of societies conceived in Western civilization” and thus that “*Black radicalism is a negation of Western civilization, but not in the direct sense of a simple dialectical negation*” (96, emphasis in the original). Following from this, we can see that Césaire’s arguments on the need for civilizational renewal from different memories than those of Imperial Man, from the incorporation of the embodied Black subject into the modern/colonial world system via slavery, opens the grounds for a radically other ordering of the world.

For instance, the poem “Mississippi” conjoins the emerging struggle for Martinican self-determination via an outer-national identification to the history of civil-rights organizing in the American South, and the violence that is the motivating force of such organizing. In the poem Césaire thus proclaims “Too bad for you men who don’t notice that my eyes remember / slings and black flags / that murder with each blink of my Mississippi lashes” (1-3). Here the poet’s body fuses with the historical violence visited on Black communities throughout the diaspora. Césaire repeats this invocation three more times in the short poem, before ending with a final image of unstoppable creation “under the calm ferocity of the immense geranium of our sun” (14). Thus, we see here several things. First, is that the play of pain across the body, meant to reduce the Black subject to a thing void of consciousness, the memory of which for Césaire grounds an unexpected (“too bad for you men who don’t notice”) vitality that is capable of transforming the world. Second, this is done through a play between geographical and historical place and the destabilizing fact of Blackness. Here we see it in the invocation of Caribbean nature and geography as a new horizon, but beyond that in the refrain of ‘Mississippi’ as an outer-national identification with the American South’s history as a ground for creating common affective ties among the African diaspora. However, this is not an identification in some easy, comparative sense, but places that geo-historical location in a complex play of other signifiers, such that the immense ‘geranium’ of the Caribbean sun comes to articulate a continual process of creation that is civilizational in scope. Thus, the Mississippi eyes of the poet are continually rearticulated in a series of images that come to cohere not so much around a definable statement as a series of mutational relations between violence, the Black body, and the proliferation of histories that their interaction undergirds in the New World. Thus, it is only by linking his own subjectivity to the “Mississippi lashes”, that is, to the violent process by which Black subjects are formed and managed in the modern/colonial world, that Césaire is able to imagine, via the image of the Caribbean sun, a new subjectivity which shows the insufficiency of modernity/coloniality and the possibility of transformative action.

This reading, and my chapter, has largely focused on Césaire’s work in relation to the construction of Blackness within modernity/coloniality, rather than turning to images which could possibly index the standard dismissal of Négritude as an essentialized

fetishization of a pure African origin. Nick Nesbitt, arguing for Césaire's poetics as a political praxis predicated largely on the French tradition from the Jacobins to the present, claims that "while he rightly celebrated the legacy and accomplishments of afro-Atlantic cultures, these specificities never served to ground the ethical and political claims he made against global imperialism" (271). Indeed, as Nesbitt goes on to argue, Césaire's work "will interpolate every reader, no matter their previous 'identity, but will do so via their own singular specificity" (280). What is important here is not that the work of either Robinson or Nesbitt is necessarily more 'true' in terms of one's interpretation of Césaire's life and work, capable of providing a pure origin for his politics in an African homeland, colonial diaspora or French political tradition. Indeed, the point of this chapter is not to advance some truth but rather to draw from his work principles of decolonial poetics as autopoietic subjectivation. And, moreover, this split between the material life of the Black radical tradition which Césaire sought to give voice to on the one hand, and a European intellectual tradition on the other, speaks both to Césaire's own middle class origins as well as his larger goal of civilizational transformation on the interlocking local and global scales. As he says in *Discours* "show me where I have talked of a return" (Discourse 45).

Thus, what we have in each case are different histories, different articulations of bodies and ways of knowing and doing within the structural coupling that brings the Caribbean into existence. And, Césaire sits at the point at which both of these traditions meet. From our examination of his poetics, it will be possible to understand the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject in relation to geo-history and community, that is, the geo- and body-politics of knowledge. Césaire's poetry shows how thinking from the body is not just a simple act of identification or representation, but a complex articulation of sometimes conflicting traditions. It is poetry as a political-epistemic intervention within the autonomous self-organization of society.

We have already established that, in regards to colonized and racialized subjects, from the colonality of being comes controllable subjectivities positioned in service to the needs of the modern/colonial world system and Imperial Man. One of the tasks of decoloniality, as I have been discussing it, then, is to help in the formation of new

subjectivities. Drawing on Mignolo's concepts of the geo- and body- politics of knowledge, we can draw out some lessons on what that looks like. The construction and maintenance of life in the modern/colonial world is such that the figure of Imperial Man emerges as the normative point of articulation in the production of knowledge, and that knowledge is universal and abstract, grounded in the hubris of the zero point. Descartes' "I think therefore I am" thus acts to both conceal the systems of domination that structure the world of the Imperial subject, while also concealing the vulnerability of that subject by projecting their agency into a timeless space beyond the body: thought proceeds embodied agency. Against this, decolonial thinkers have attempted to think from the colonial difference, that is, from the bodies that exist in various states of domination in relation to their very constitution as knowable bodies and autonomous subjects. In doing so, Mignolo argues that what the disavowal of the racial imaginary of modernity revealed was a state in which the colonized think from their embodied communal lives, such that they are "no longer the other, and the irrationality of the other is located in the racial and patriarchal discourse on modernity" (Further Thoughts 41). Thus, following Gordon's work on 'problem people' Mignolo attempts a shift towards thinking from the bodies and experiences of the colonized and racialized of the world, arguing that "different perspectives on modernity are not only a question of the eyes, then, but also of consciousness and of physical location and power differential" (Delinking 320). Thus, what emerges is a mode of knowledge production that is summarized as "I am where I think and do."

This assertion works such that "the basic assumption is that the knower is always implicated, geo- and body- politically, in the known" (Darker 123). Thus "the first step in decolonial thinking is to accept the interconnections between geo-history and epistemology, and between biography and epistemology" as these locations and bodies have been constructed and ranked by the colonial matrix of power (91). This means that the local is always implicated in and by the global, and a focus on the geo- and body- politics of knowledge works such that, instead of narratives of national origins in service to the ordering of the modern/colonial world, "what is left is a displacement from political identification at a national level, to identification with subject positions at a global capitalist-economy level" (Local 190). What does this mean for the philosophical

anthropology of the decolonial subject, and this subject's negotiation of the structural coupling between, for Césaire, the Black and European radical traditions?

In their work, Maturana and Varela make a distinction between structure and organization in regards to the autopoietic development of autonomous unities. On the one hand, organization represents the overall relation of parts within a unity that define it. On the other, structure refers to the concrete arrangement of those parts in any given unity. Going back to the construction of humanity through the figure of Imperial Man then, we can see that the overall organization of humanity is obtained by valorizing certain biological features and cultural histories, certain ways of knowing and doing as structures which attain a normative value defining the human as such. This is contrasted to alternative structures, alternative ways of knowing and doing, which are seen as deficient. However, in my work on colonial consumption, we see that this process is itself the institution of the organization of modernity/coloniality, and that the two models of *humanitas* and *anthropos* are not autonomous unities, but the overall structure of humanity within coloniality in a way that robs humanity of agency while over representing those labeled *humanitas* as a normative measure. The relation to the geo- and body- politics of knowing and doing allows us to destabilize this relationship, by placing the human subject within its field of history in relation to geographic and biographic developments as the product of structural couplings. It does not posit a universal and essential essence, but rather sees the subject as embedded in specific histories of structural coupling that have selected certain possibilities, certain traditions and identifications, certain ways of knowing and doing, as normative in order to develop them within the overall frame of modernity/coloniality. Decoloniality then represents a means of selecting other traditions from which to organize local and global formations of the human.

This allows us to fill out Wynter's concept of humanity as hybrid - *bios* and *logos* - as the grounds for the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject, one who is situated and yet from that situation can draw understandings of the world to configure forms of agency in their relationality. In the poem "Nocturnal Crossing" (21) Césaire thus speaks of "the animal alloy of muscle and voice". Importantly, this poem moves

“between the arms of a scream” and the embodied relation of the subject to the violence of domination is concretized. Rather than salvation then, in asking to be put between the arms of the scream, Césaire is searching for a kind of fulfillment, a means of turning the absence of the racialized subject and the violence that maintains the system, into a point of (re)generation. Later, in the prose poem “Transmutation” (35) this connection between voice, materiality, and creation is concretized in the continual transmuting image of the poet’s hands through a series of forms that mark the connection between his agency and the world around him: “I have my diving-suit hands I also have my hands for rocking the little children...my pearl diver hands that are accustomed to the depths”. The poem ends with the image of the poet’s flaming hands “to serve as a scarecrow for the birds of the solstice” in an image of rebirth in which the creative agency of the poet, when placed in contact with nature, becomes the medium by which horizons of transformation open in the world. This conforms to a sense of the body that is beyond any normative sense of coherence offered in the figure of Imperial Man and the colonial consumption that sustains it as the organizing subject of modernity/coloniality. Thus, in his poetry Césaire offers a model of the human that is embedded in complex relations to the historical formation of societies, the social reality of the body, and the geographical space of the natural world.

Seeing Césaire as “a labourer of words” such that “the production of (poetic) objects becomes productive in turn of consciousness” Nesbitt aligns his analysis with Césaire’s invocation of ‘animal alloy’ and ties his poetics to the practice of humanity beyond modernity/coloniality (279). Césaire thus struggled against colonialism but “within poetry itself, as a struggle to make a poetics of revolution and a politics of culture” aimed at the material and symbolic organization of Martinican, Caribbean, and Black, reality (283). Arguing that “politics, like poetry, is an intervention into the symbolic realm, the profound torsion of the transcendental coordinates by which any world is indexed,” Nesbitt focuses on “the word as the constitutive, minimal unit or term that determines the visibility or invisibility of any being in a world” as the material-symbolic point of insurgency that undergirds “Césaire’s undertaking as a vast poetics of post-imperial reason” (283-4). In other words, in this mode of subjectivation, “a traumatic core or structural lack of the symbolic order undergoes a torsion that opens



onto a new consistency” which is decoloniality (286). This subject is a constructed intervention into the material-symbolic ordering of the world, based in specific histories of embodiment, yet exploding towards new worlds. Thus, “the process of naming is central to this transformation of colonized consciousness...[and] gives form to the desire and drive for decolonization” (202). Articulating this desire across histories of African and European interaction, “the name is an objectification, the initial concretization of this struggle, which orients it and, in its simplification of a complex situation, serves to unify the diversity of demands, agendas, and positions of the individuals in revolt” (202).

In a later poem, “New Year” (87), Césaire makes this connection explicit as the poet begins “Out of their torments men carved a flower / that they perched on the high plateaus of their faces” and ends “that was the year when the seeds of humankind chose within man the tender approach of a new heart”. Poetry, for Césaire, is thus the means by which “unforgettable / metamorphoses” are possible, which can draw on the histories of violence as well as of ancestral knowledge, to forge new connections with Others and the world, and thus to advance a new practice of humanity. This is a poetics in which the subject is never easily separated from their history and community, their geo- and body-politics of knowing and doing, even as this relationship structures their agency and thus their ability to see and transform this context. Poetics in this manner becomes a way of the subjects forming themselves differently, of coming to know the world in terms of complex autopoietic practices that are creative and open ended. This is Césaire’s climate of poetic violence, in which the violence of the modern/colonial order is transformed, translated, into a new form of agency that subtracts from the established order so as to create new spaces of creativity and solidarity. This is what Césaire, in “Calling the Magician” refers to when he says that “the true poet does not preach work. He preaches availability” in relation to the world and others in it (122). Thus, poetics is needed to understand the decolonial subject based on an anthropology of the human as *bios* and *logos*, part of communal self-organization of autopoiesis beyond the coherence of Imperial Man, allowing not only a concern with the critique of violence and domination, but the cultural reproduction of the subject as well. That is why Césaire claims “the revolution will be social and poetic or will not be” (Calling 121). The creation of the decolonial subject is a process that occurs in a concrete relation to the geopolitical and

embodied situation of the colonized, and further, its poetics is such that the social structure is itself destabilized by its revolutionary force. What Césaire shows us is that decolonization isn't a simple hailing of the already constituted subject, but a mode of subjectivation that structures new modes of being hybridly human, beyond the absolute terms of Imperial Man.

## Weaving the Border: Cecilia Vicuña and Translational Agency

In this chapter I will turn to the work of Chilean poet and artist Cecilia Vicuña in order to understand the poem as a liminal space, that is, as the space of the border that forms the site of decolonial thought in the gaps and interstices of the modern/colonial world. Building from the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject, formed in a dynamic process of autopoietic self-organization of thinking from, I will here explore what exactly defines the ‘poetic climate’ as a border space that is necessarily contingent and social, a thinking with that engages the reader from within the colonial difference. Thus I will bring to the fore Gordon’s orienting question of the metacritique of reason, as the border is a liminal space that foregrounds the contingency of interpretation as a continual practice of translation beyond any totalizing narratives. Instead, manifesting a site that exists between different autopoietic fields and which engages in a translational practice, what Mignolo calls border thinking highlights the creative political-epistemic potential that emerges between immanence and theory, difference and proximity, as the grounds for a decolonial relationality beyond modernity/coloniality.

Born and raised in Santiago de Chile, Cecelia Vicuña “has been in exile since the early 1970’s, when the murder of elected president Salvador Allende by General Pinochet” brought the country of Chile under military dictatorship (Lippard 7). A supporter of Allende’s Popular Unity government and a fierce critic of the dictatorship, Vicuña has throughout her career made art, poetry, and drama that drew on the Indigenous heritage of the Andes in order to advance a liberatory vision of a world beyond the dictatorship and, as I will argue, modernity/coloniality. As Lucy Lippard states, this has been a practice “in the interstices” and between the borders of cultural traditions and their legitimating world views (8). In Vicuña’s work “the investigation of language and the politics of definition are always at stake” (de Zegher 24). How should this meeting between cultures be conceptualized? Answering this question will require fleshing out the process of colonial consumption in regards to the constitution of space, seen in the concept of *nomos*.

Key to Mignolo's theory of decoloniality is his engagement with the work of German political thinker Carl Schmitt on *nomos*. *Nomos* for Schmitt, and Mignolo, refers to the geopolitical extension of sovereignty, that is, to the sovereign creation of the space in which the law organizes forms of ordered life as well as its demarcation of the space of the outside as a space of chaos. It is, then, the space in which an autopoietic unity establishes a certain relationship of coherence and order. Yet, this will be important later, the outside, and its construction in relation to the inside, is itself bound to the legal and representational projections of the inside. It is, says Mignolo, the outside constructed in the process of making the inside (Delinking 316). Following from our previous discussion of primitive accumulation in relation to the Black radical tradition, we can see that this is a situation whereby two nodes of socio-historic experience are thereby coupled in one order of colonial consumption - given coherence by Imperial Man - necessitating a political-epistemic intervention.

There is another aspect of *nomos* that Mignolo draws out however. As he examines Schmitt's theory he notes several things. First, that Schmitt's theory performs a sleight of hand. Schmitt begins with the assertion of a multipolar world, divided by a series of *nomoi* that are locally but not globally interconnected in different ways and across different expanses (Anomie x). However, he then goes on to assert that the second *nomos* of the earth formed in the age of European expansion and hegemony, subsuming all others and transforming them into either its internal or external Others. The sleight of hand, for Mignolo, is in asserting that this amounted to the superseding and destruction of the others, which he roundly rejects (xi). In this rejection, decolonial projects are grounded in the resurgence and regeneration of these other *nomos*, albeit changed by their new global frame and the new questions and problems that they must deal with. The aspect that is drawn out here is that of Schmitt's own narrativizing of the emergence of the second *nomos*. That is, in addition to a legal and representational order, the second *nomos*, and all others, also are instantiated through the ways in which they are narrativized in connection to origins as a means of ordering the world for the existence and sustenance of certain forms of life. Thus, a *nomos* is what Sylvia Wynter would call an autopoietic field of material-symbolic organization in which a given society is

“enabled to fictively construct and performatively enact” itself in relation to the world (Ceremony Found 196).

This means several things. First, that the legal and representational systems of the *nomos* are part of a larger construction and justification of forms of life that ground themselves on an extra-human agency narrativized through recourse to history, progress or other forms of universal development in relation to a given origin. Second, it means that there is a two-way adjustment by each *nomos* as they come into contact with each other, disturbing their fields of relation that they had previously established. That is, on the one hand, all non-Western fields are yoked to the West's, incorporated internally or externally in ways that subordinate them to Western law, representation, and narrativizing. They then become resources for the West's continuing autopoietic becoming. On the other hand, these peoples themselves undergo changes as their autopoietic fields are disrupted while at the same time being opened up to new relations. It is bridging this disruption, incorporating the new relations into a resurgence of their autopoietic field in the creation of ways of life outside of the European colonial-capitalist *nomos* that decoloniality takes up. They seek, then, a new narrative, as was previously seen in the construction of the decolonial subject based on an understanding of humanity as *bios* and *logos*. This philosophical anthropology then contributes to an understanding of the space of decoloniality. Not a space of common identity, but a space of common conditions of existence, constructed through the affective connections of bodies and places.

Through the work of Santiago Castro-Gomez, I can go further and link this sense of cosmology, and the relation of one's embodied experience to it, to what he calls 'literacy as state-of-grace.' Similar to Mignolo's rhetoric of modernity, literacy as state-of-grace functions as an ideology which ties together the acceptance of a world order as a structuring authority, with the "hope that one day we may become its citizens" by accepting Western norms concerning the power of literacy as a "sign and vehicle of civilization" (237-8). This effects a relationship in which the local is overdetermined by the global, where local subjects work from their own communities towards an identification with this global order (240). Key to this work, however, is the

acknowledgement that this identification exists within a system of capitalist accumulation and colonial organization of identities. This is what Castro-Gomez, relating to Marx's idea of primitive accumulation, explains as the space of antagonism: a space in which different forms of life are captured and translated by normative systems into value-forms in service to the accumulation of capital rather than the self-valorization of communities (239). What this requires then is a 'suspension of the law' that disrupts these processes of valorization in the name of social experiments with alternative orderings of value, seizing on the ambiguity offered by structural couplings that bring together distinct autopoietic fields (246).

The concept of antagonism, when placed in our framework of *nomoi* as autopoietic field, can thus allow us to differentiate between alternative modes of power. Against the state-mediated, colonial-capitalist power that organizes the modern/colonial world around the figure of Imperial Man in a process of colonial consumption, we can thus turn to Enrique Dussel's conception of proximity and power grounded in community, as discussed by Alejandro Vallega. Against a model of political power that seek to impose order from a centralized sovereign, Dussel argues that "all political power arises from below" and that "the power of the community" thus precedes its centralized representation in the figure of Imperial Man (Vallega 67). This constructs political power in relation to the autopoietic self-instituting and self-organization of the community in service to its will to live according to concrete forms of knowing and doing. Concomitant with this new formulation comes the concept of proximity. Opposed to the distance between knower and known that undergirds the Cartesian subject and the possessive individuality of Imperial Man, proximity "recalls for us in concrete terms our most proximate human experiences" (69). That is, the decolonial subject is defined in its situated distinctiveness to others, such that our existence is maintained "out of a fundamental human proximity in distinctness...as we approach the other and as we sustain our relationships in the consciousness of the other's distinctness" (69). It is this proximity which modernity/coloniality obscures as it translates the space of proximity into value-forms oriented toward colonial consumption. And it is this proximity that decoloniality seeks to sustain.

This relationship of proximity, power, and nomos as autopoietic field can help to understand the role that culture, including art and literature, plays in the formation of modern/colonial spaces. Important to this discussion will be the work of Michael J. Shapiro and Néstor García Canclini. In his work *Methods and Nations* (2004), Shapiro examines the confluence of modern social sciences, culture, and the formation and legitimization of nation-states in the face of their colonial histories. Shapiro starts from the observation, which we have noted previously in relation to the concept of nomos as autopoietic fields, that “signifying practices do not simply disseminate information...they impose an order with respect to who can perform speech acts with significant collective consequences” (xvi). Shapiro thereby highlights that “it is necessary to treat the modern state not simply on the basis of its sovereign or external exclusions but also as a set of homogenizing practices” that discursively and materially produce a unified national space (19). Thus, what emerges in the formation of the nation-state is a cultural governance operating in “support of diverse genres of expression that can be staged to warrant the emerging sovereignty practices and the inhibition of those that do not” and which thereby pose a problem to the smooth integration of various populations into the hegemonic social organization (182). Importantly, governance in this case is not simply a process of unification and legitimization, but “a historical process in which boundaries are imposed, and peoples are accorded varying degrees of cultural coherence and political eligibility - not on the basis of natural divisions, but as a result of the exercise of power” (xvii). Finally, the nation-state, as it legitimizes certain forms of discourse and practice, works to order the social bodies over which it claims sovereignty, and “nationalizing states translate biological bodies into social bodies” (41). Thus, Mignolo argues that “coloniality of power is embedded in the state and as such it reproduces the colonial difference and represses the possibilities of thinking from it “in a relationship in which the local, considered as a closed, homogeneous territory, is overdetermined by the global as it is incorporated into the modern/colonial world-system (Local 263). Cultural governance is especially important to the consideration of decolonial poetics, as “one of the strong weapons in building homogenous imagined communities was the belief in a national language, which was tied up with national literature and contributed, in the domain of language, to the national culture” (Shapiro 218).

By turning to John Beverley's *Against Literature* we can gain more insight in the role of culture in legitimizing modern/colonial nation-states and forms of power. In the first place, Beverley is clear that by literature he means "the historically specific form it assumes between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries with the formation of the European vernacular languages, the modern nation-state, colonialism, capitalism and bourgeois culture, moveable type technology, the commodification of books and printing, and the modern university and education system" (viii). Literature, after all, came to the Americas with Columbus and "this fact has endowed Latin American literature with an ambiguous cultural role and legacy" (2). This institutes, as we have seen in relation to literacy as state-of-grace, a certain relationship to power such that "difference could be tolerated - even encouraged - but only within the centralized power system represented by the state and national language, which existed, like the literary text itself, both to make difference possible and to contain it" (25-6). This set up literature in a process of overvalorization, as a key value for the formation of modern and nationalist identities and ideologies where "the poem sets up a sphere of private experience and private self that is distinct from but not in contradiction with the public sphere and the public identity of the subject as a social agent" (38). This was in contradistinction to previous forms of organizing difference and knowledge in relation to power that existed pre-contact as part of Indigenous autopoietic fields. One such form was the quipu which, "consisting of woollen cords with knots...is an Inca instrument that registers events, circumstances, and numerals...these registering artifacts continued to be used during the first period of the conquista, to be replaced later by written systems" (34). Vicuña has engaged directly with the quipu throughout her career, often using it to ground a larger engagement with the relationship between Andean and European forms of life.

QUIPOem (1997), for example, is a book which alternates short lyrics with photographic representations of Vicuña's precarios: "a series of small sculptures and installations constructed of found objects, or 'rubbish', made in landscapes, streets, or studio" (Lippard 8). In her words, the precarios sprung from a desiring force, a "form of communicating with the sun and the sea that gave me a lot of pleasure and a lot of strength" (qtd. in Lippard 8). Drawn together from scraps and detritus, bound by thread in loose, flexible patterns, the precarios, and their relation to the poems in QUIPOem bring



to the fore “the action of weaving itself [that] is the esthetic and spiritual thread” running through her work and thought as an engagement with Andean traditions (10). Ultimately, it is the art of weaving as a means of making connections that I want to look at in her work, and the way this fluidity, actualized at the intersection of Western and Andean forms of thinking and doing, can open up the space of the border. Indeed, even her use of language is likened to weaving, in the way in which she recovers discarded memories and histories, investing them with new life, dissecting words “so that their internal metaphors were exposed, so people would see words not just as abstractions but as something very concrete” (Vicuña qtd. in Lippard 13).

This contrast between the materiality of the quipu and that of the written letter, which gradually replaced it as a mode of cultural governance, speaks directly to the concept of literacy as state-of-grace and the construction of civilization in relation to European autopoietic practices. On the most basic level the letter was the graphic, material means by which the colonies were administered and the cultures of the Indigenous inhabitants absorbed into the colonial system. However, in addition to this practical component, the system of alphabetic writing used by the colonizers was the basis upon which the colonial difference was erected, and was translated from a difference in material systems of recording memory to a chronological and progressive difference in the levels of civilization. Thus, Mignolo quotes an early colonial report that characterizes the indigenous inhabitants of ‘the New World’ as “people without writing, without letters, without written characters, and without any kind of enlightenment” (Renaissance 45). This association of the perceived lack in Indigenous cultures due to the absence of the written word was thus the basis from which an evolutionary model of writing was established, which saw the written, alphabetic character as the point from which all other systems were to be judged. Furthermore, through this evolutionary model the written, alphabetic system of writing used by the European colonialists became associated with an ideal of civilization and refinement, such that an implicit connection was made in which “linguistic behaviour and good manners are [taken for] signs of the civilizing process” (34). The letter as it was related to this civilizing process was thus a central means for the denial of coevalness practiced by the colonial powers, which is to say, that they incorporated the language and non-alphabetic writing practices of the

Indigenous peoples in a contrasting chronological, rather than spatial, relationship that supported colonialism and Indigenous dispossession.

Colonial consumption thus rests on a one-way relationship of translation as Indigenous reality was incorporated into a Western understanding of the world. This process can be read through Dipesh Chakrabarty's idea of colonial translation. Colonial translation is the process whereby colonial systems absorb non-European ones into the system of universal reason. It does this by positing universal reason as a higher level process which contains the particularities of each culture within universal applicability (75). Furthermore, this obscures the lives, values, and knowledges of colonized peoples, as well as the ideological, political and historical bases that structure this relationship. Thus, contingent cultural differences are transformed into universal values, and the structural coupling that obtains between distinct autopoietic fields is one of colonial consumption that, on the epistemic level, is translational in nature, serving to facilitate the creation of value-forms for colonial-capitalist accumulation.

The work of Stuart Hall in his essay "Encoding/Decoding", while focused in the field of media studies, can help to situate the place of the poetic object within colonial consumption understood as a translational zone. Hall argues that he wants to "think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments - productions, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction" (123). This model thinks of communication as a 'complex structure of dominance' "sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains its distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence" (123). The object of these practices, he says, are meanings, which undergo a series of transformations as they pass through each stage of the process from the world to the work to its consumption by the audience. The work itself is thus the discursive form in which circulation takes place, but requires operations of translation in order to establish a relationship between reader and writer. These translational operations are social practices which structure production and consumption on the material and symbolic levels (123). Thus, "no one moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated. Since each has its specific modality and conditions of existence,

each can constitute its own break or interruption of the ‘passage of forms’ on whose continuity the flow of effective production (that is, ‘reproduction’) depends” (123). The moments of production and reception “are not, therefore, identical, but they are related: they are differential moments within the totality formed by the social relations of the communicative process as a whole” and thus joined by the poem itself which mediates and organizes the institutional-societal relations (124-5). Importantly “the codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical” and may thus form parts of different autopoietic fields (125). Colonial consumption thus occurs when the autopoietic field being harnessed for production - either as subject matter or material form - is completely subsumed to the autopoietic field of the receiver in a structural coupling whereby the receiver reproduces meaning from the structural positionality of Imperial Man within modernity/coloniality at a distance that sustains the global order against autonomous proximity.

However, it should be noted that Hall’s model, based on the production of mass media, has several limitations when we attempt to use it to understand the relationship of decoloniality. Hall’s work assumes, if not an absolute identification, then at least a relationship of normativity, figured via Imperial Man, that organizes the relationship between sender and receiver. Thus, while the producer may want to question dominant interpretations, in the case of decolonial poetics they want, more than questioning, to suspend dominant, normalized worldviews entirely. And while the reader may already be sympathetic to decolonial concerns, the goal of the poet is nonetheless to convoke that reader into a relationship of subjectivation and insurgency. Thus, by placing Hall’s work in a model of colonial consumption, we can see that the goal of decolonial poetics is the disruption of this consumption, engaging the reader in a relationship beyond the organizing coherence of modernity/coloniality.

The work that I will now turn to, and examine throughout the remainder of this chapter, is a performance given by Vicuña at The Poetry Project at St. Mark’s Church on May 6, 1995 and later collected in the collection *Spit Temple* (2012) edited by Rosa Alcalá and published by Ugly Duckling Presse. I will be working from both the recorded version of the performance as well as the transcription available in the published book.

While I will speak more to what this kind of generic instability means for the conceptualization of the border as a political-epistemic space of translation, for now I will simply point to the ways in which this instability is built into the performance itself. That is, the performance numbers among what Vicuña call her quasars “because they were quasi per, quasi form...they were nothingness itself in formation” (Spit Temple 124). This sense of a formal emergence is something that defines the philosophical anthropology of decoloniality as a constant reformulation of materials in a definite time and space, working to shape received knowledges into new formations beyond the structures and strictures of modernity/coloniality. The performance itself is one that engages with its environment, with Vicuña directly addressing the crowd, turning at points to acknowledge the sound of the surrounding city, and working in readings of older poems from her career as well as new works, always in the form of a variation that questions any idea of an essentialized original.

The relationships between language, sound, meaning and the construction of the world are key themes of this quasar. As I have already examined, the theme of weaving together scraps of language is omnipresent formally and thematically throughout Vicuña’s work. Now I would like to turn to three moments where she specifically draws these themes together. The first is in the opening. Vicuña states that “the word is time / and sound / breathing” (125-6). This thus ties together the body, the social interaction of communication, and the passage of time in relation to memory as the world is articulated from the confluence of all these factors. Further, she goes on to state that “sound / is enchanting / light” (126). Thus, it is not that the relationship of the word, the body, and the community gives rise to an objective description of the world, but rather that language is a form of enchantment, creating from the surroundings a world in the sense of a shared space and time of belonging, an autopoietic field. In other words, it is the *logos* that supplements and enlivens the *bios* in Wynter’s conception of the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject, here placed in relationship to its space of elaboration. Second, Vicuña turns to a story of the origin of sound told in South America. In this story, there are two groups of people, those who write and those who sing. She notes that in this myth, the people of the Rainforest say that when they were created, the gods gave them memory so that they could remember their stories, and thus sustain in

their daily communal actions the enchanting of the world that forms their autopoietic field. Conversely, there were some, representing anthropologists, who had no memory and were created with a little notebook in their hands. This represents the knowing of Imperial Man, the abstract view from nowhere in which the world is reduced to its translation and transcription from a distance. That this transcription is one that is colonial is shown by the third moment I wish to discuss. This is a second story about the origin of sound that Vicuña tells, in which she speaks of how, when people come to Lima from the mountains, they hear the noises of the cars and that this noise is the sound of a being that is feeding on the blood and body of the Indians. Thus, sound as a means of transcription by anthropologists is linked to the modern/colonial world of industrialization which seeks to open up Indigenous lands for resource extraction and settlement. Importantly, during the telling of this later story, she pauses to listen to those same sounds in New York, drawing a transnational connection that notes the omnipresence of modernity/coloniality as well as its distance from autonomous autopoietic forms of life sustained by proximity. What I want to argue, then, is that in disrupting the process of colonial consumption that orders relationships across the abstract space of knowledge production, a decolonial poetics produces a border space via a structural coupling that seeks to build a new space of encounter.

This constitutive problem can be thought through the work of Wolfgang Iser on the process of interpretation. In his work, Iser examines the specific modalities of several types of interpretation, from the hermeneutic circle to recursive loops. While the process of the interpretation of poetic works is most obviously grounded in the work of hermeneutic circles, all of his models can bear some relation to various processes by which coloniality or decoloniality can operate in the construction of material-symbolic objects. Thus, my concern will be with the overall assertion of his arguments. To begin with, like Mignolo, Iser apprehends the way in which interpretation can be restricted by hegemonic values or cosmogonies, such that “monopolies of interpretation thus present themselves as transcendental grandstand views, and although they see themselves as frameworks for the reality to be grasped, they actually seek to shape that reality according to their presuppositions” (2). Against the valorization of either the monopoly of interpretation by certain views, or the ethical and political assertions for subaltern

corrective views, he points to the constitutive translational basis of both forms of interpretation: “Each interpretation transposes something into something else. We should therefore shift our focus away from underlying presuppositions to the space that is opened up when something is translated into a different register” (5). This places a focus on the liminal space that is produced in all attempts at interpretation, such that “interpretation is primarily a performative act rather than an explanatory one” and constitutes a process of autopoietic organization (7).

Of course, there is always a “residual untranslatability” that “transforms itself into the power that drives” the construction of meaning as an autopoietic process (147). This is made explicit by Iser, who argues that “the force that gathers in the liminal space has a poetic quality, as it brings something about that hitherto did not exist” (150). In a relationship of colonial consumption, coloniality “converts interpretation into an act that determines the intended meaning of the subject matter. When this happens, interpretation ceases. The colonization of the liminal space therefore sacrifices translatability and with it the chance to embrace more than was possible before the superimposition” in favour of reproducing the stability of Imperial Man and access to the autopoietic field of the colonized (151). It is “through this structural coupling, [that] the register - by opening access - is bound to make inroads into the very subject matter, as it is purpose-governed and hence through its very intervention occasions disturbances” (151). Functioning as a charting of reality, interpretation thus works to construct the worlds in which we live (154). Against colonial consumption, whereby interpretation is subordinated to maintaining the order of modernity/coloniality, there is thus the option to dwell within the translational liminal space of interpretation. This is the space of the border, and it is where Hall’s moment of circulation, the poem, is destabilized from a fixed object to a mediation of the autopoietic fields that structure production and reception.

Thinking from the border between the modern/colonial world system constitutes the displacement of hegemonic universal reason “from the perspective of the subaltern” and a “striving to bring to the foreground the force and creativity of knowledges subalternized during the long process of colonization” (Local 12). It is important to note however, that this is not a simple rejection of universal reason and the implementation of

a different hegemonic cultural tradition, but a thinking in two traditions from the perspective of the interaction of Indigenous and European social practices (67). Thus, it takes neither universal reason, nor the local traditions of knowledge as given, but as a history to be thought through and from, an articulation arising from the lived experience of the colonial difference and the different traditions that are appropriated in the life of the subject. The border is thus the space in which the decolonial subject is formed, and the space in which the metacritique of reason can be operationalized from the philosophical anthropology of decoloniality. Border thinking in relation to the decolonial subject lets us see that the ambiguity of antagonism is threatening because it contains other orders of living, ways of thinking and doing, that are never fully subsumed in the processes of colonial consumption. Thus, it allows the engagement of the constitutive logic of modernity/coloniality from different sites, and the border is the site of interaction that the geo- and body- politics of knowledge opens up in the process of consumption. Border thinking thus changes the way in which difference is conceived, and represents a means of thinking past dichotomies and into relationality. Border thinking thus represents a way of articulating a collective understanding that arises from shared histories and situations in a specific location and relationship of proximity.

Indeed, the formal structure of the quasar itself is that of a border space actualized by acts of translation. This can be seen throughout as Vicuña switches from language to language as she moves through different parts of the performance, switching between English and Spanish. Additionally, the Spanish itself is entangled with Quechua loan words or translations. For example the performance begins with a Spanish verse sung by Vicuña opening “Basura sa liva” and ending “qori wantu” (125). The first line translates as ‘garbage spit’ while the last as ‘gold berth’, itself a Quechua phrase. The Quechua phrase is suggested by the similarity between the English word ‘litter’ and the Spanish translation of the Quechua phrase ‘litera de oro’ (125). This yoking together of meaning across various languages is thus itself a performance of the relationship between the discarded (garbage spit) and its revaluation (golden) when placed in new formal relationships (berth). This sense of destabilization via translation is taken up throughout the quasar. For instance, later, in turning to one of her older poems, she reads it as translated into “proper English” by Suzanne Jill Levine for publication in the American

Poetry Review Vol.24 No. 3 (134). Coming right after the performance of a verse entirely in Spanish, and untranslated in the performance, this idea of ‘proper English’, and the relationship between language and the ordered coherence of the world it describes, is thus given an ironic twist. And later, when reading a poem from her translated book *Unravelling the Words & the Weaving of Water* she reads the Spanish version followed by the translated English. This continual clash of languages, and the worlds that they encode, is thus such that any stability, any sense of a ‘proper’ organization of the world beyond the momentary performance of the poet in proximity to the audience is destabilized into the space of the border. Thus, the border is a space woven in the attempt to create forms of living in the world between the proper languages and the modern/colonial world that underwrites this propriety. Indeed, in her final verse she speaks of poetry as a weaving of concepts, of language and reality such that two threads “one spun to the right / the other one to the left / so that they are in tension like lovemaking / to one another / this is what makes / the weaving / sacred” (137). This is given a cosmogonic scope as she says that “the world is a loose stitch” and “an account / of the people / tying it all...the stars / the river weaves / the woven / woven into one” (139). This constitutes the border as an autopoietic field that forms in the structural coupling of prior fields, and is a relationship of immanence that is able to disrupt the norms that organize this coupling as one of colonial consumption. In doing so, Vicuña’s poetics offer a new enchantment of the world.

This is because art, as one of its functions, is a practice that exists in tension with other consumption norms, able to disrupt and question them with alternative viewpoints, especially as art spreads beyond a defined field. As Nestor Garcia Canclini notes, art in the 21st century has moved beyond where any simple characterization of it as autonomous can be meaningful. Rather, we find that “the tremendous spread of video, computer animation, video games, and the multimedia uses of mobile phones has shattered earlier limits on the visual arts” (16). Furthermore, the proliferation of art fairs, museums, and auctions within a globalized art market, coupled with the spread of artistic practices outside of this market in the form of political demonstrations or advertising means that “we must pay attention to the multiple allegiances and mobile locations of actors who exhibit their art” and that these locations can no longer be theorized as



existing in an autonomous state, separated from the other logics and contexts in which they occur and with which they interact (20). Against an art springing from “the abstract concept of humanity as conceived in the Enlightenment” Canclini advocates “conceptual instability, variable meanings, in the ways artifacts are used” (56). This means taking into account both the global reach of art, as well as its local entanglements, colonial consumption and cultural legitimization as well as resistance and (re-)enchantment.

From this global system Canclini draws an aesthetics of imminence. In the post-autonomous world, art is a matter of not only recognizing it through the aesthetic regime, but of appropriating objects for different means. “Appropriations are movements of power” he claims, that can place objects in many different contexts, moving them across and through the colonial difference (66). The basis of this is an acknowledgment of art’s contingency, its openness to the polysemy of metaphor which in turn opens up objects to multiple interpretations, multiple appropriations against the rigidity of a unified space that sorts them into their place. Thus, the localization of an artist in different autopoietic fields allows him or her to create from different cosmologies and histories. Imminence for Canclini is a state of “being on the outside and on the inside”, a part of the aesthetic regime and yet moving it in new directions (180). This imminence is an opening of subjectivity to the new and is “linked to practices that don’t take place in a vacuum, operating instead in the midst of unequal conditions under limitations that artists share with nonartists” (185). Art is ultimately “a way of getting things to remain unsolved” opening up a space for the formation of new subjectivities and new autopoietic practices formed by the competing logics structuring the globalized world (28).

Thus, the border is a meeting place between two autopoietic fields where they immanently contain the possibility of an-other order that doesn’t sacrifice either the Indigenous body nor the transnational connection and intercultural contacts that Vicuña weaves together in her work. This can be seen in the story Vicuña tells of Lola Kiepja, a Selk’nam woman who was the last of her people living in the traditional style after their land, Tierra del Fuego, was taken through violence by the Chilean state in the mid 20th century. Importantly, this process was one of genocide. However, Vicuña tells of how Lola was enamoured with the tape recorder brought to her by anthropologists,

recognizing its use for saving some of the history of her people via its communication. And Vicuña sings an incantatory song about Lola, recovering her body from the violence of colonial consumption in order to weave it into her re-enchantment of the world. In doing so, the body of the Indigenous woman, her experiences, are given space in Vicuña's performance to enter into new relationships in the border, becoming immanently proximate to the audience. The border is then a space of dangerous crossings, it "is the social space of subaltern encounters, the Janus-faced border line in which peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves now negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics" (Saldivar 13-4).

As a contact zone between two autopoietic fields, often in an asymmetrical power relation, the border is thus a space in which the process of translation is never unidirectional. Rather, double translation becomes the formative relationship, conceptualizing a mode of translation that is established in, and sustains, proximity. Double translation "emerges from the exteriority... of the modern/colonial world, from bodies squeezed between imperial languages and those languages and categories of thought negated by and expelled from the house of imperial knowledge" and works by dynamically engaging them in an process of autopoiesis that critiques the universal abstract order of reason as well as essentialized vaporizations of the local (Darker 20). In an essay called "Toward a Sensationalistic Theory of Translation" poet Johannes Göransson takes up recent work in translation theory that seeks to acknowledge cultural difference and the impossibility of a translation ever fully communicating its context. Göransson argues that such a conception relies upon a critical distance that supposes that the foreign and local contexts, and the ideal reader standing on either side of the act of translating, are hermetically sealed and stable, except for the troubling moment of translations itself. This is the model of translation mentioned earlier in relation to Chakrabarty, and the basis of colonial consumption. Göransson advocates that "we forget about context as a field of mastery, as a way of accessing the 'true meaning' of the poem, as an 'over there'" and to take up the poem as a zone that "contains boundaries but it also traverses boundaries" in which contexts and meaning are constantly engaged in acts of translation that exceed any sense of a stable, masterly reader (Göransson). This places

poetics in an active relationship to memory as a means of disrupting its formalization via cultural governance in service to the autopoietic field of modernity/coloniality.

In her work *The Insubordination of Signs*, Nelly Richard examines the place of art under the Pinochet regime. Specifically, what I wish to focus on is her work on memory, and the ways in which she examines works of art that sought a rearticulation of memory not just in a oppositional reversal of the dictatorship, but beyond its very material-symbolic structuring of representation, its very coherence as a universe of meaning. Richard argues that such attempts were motivated by three issues which “have caused memory, compulsively, to provoke ruptures, links, and discontinuities” (1). They are the threat of loss, the task of recuperation, and the challenge of pacification. Time for these works of art “is not a time irreversibly seized and frozen in recollection...condemning memory to follow the dictum of obediently reestablishing its own continuity” but rather an engagement with the past as “a field of citations, crisscrossed as much by continuity...as by discontinuity” (2). The result is works that play out in the context of political contingency, which “committed dispossession to memory using an alphabet of survival...in the shadow of a history full of violent forced entries and oppositional struggle” (2). This space of the border, as I conceptualize it, can be thought of as a space for what is “dysfunctional for the political-discursive economy” of modernity/coloniality via conceptual and semantic rupture, disrupting processes of colonial consumption (5). In the space of the border, then, the word becomes “a zone of tensions and schisms...a field of plural and divergent forces” (6). This is all against the cultural governance in which the past is “a depository of the values of national and popular identity to be rescued and protected for the sake of communal integration” in the order cohering mode of Imperial Man (11).

Especially pertinent for my concerns is Richard’s conceptualization of memory in terms of the figure of the book as a linear conceptualization of history. Against a linear historicity, she argues that “the arrangement of these meanings may find itself altered and de-composed, as the account and its narration set in motion novel forms of recombining time and sequences, of alternating pauses and flashbacks, of anticipating endings and skipping over beginnings, through a reading that resists being so predictably subordinated

to the chronology of linear time” (18). In the release of the past at moments of temporal disjunction “the present then becomes a disjunctive knot, capable of making recollection not a return to the past...but rather a coming and going along the winding turns of a memory that does not stop at fixed points, passing instead along a critical multi-directionality of...alternatives” (18). In the context of an alphabet of survival, this is a relation in which poetics is able to give life to memory as a form of survival beyond the dominating hierarchies and violence of modernity/coloniality. It is thus a recognition of “culture’s capacity to transform and rearticulate social determinants” as

“the structural relationship between aesthetics and society is based not on the linear correspondence of form and content, but rather on responses set loose by the multiple fractures of signs involved in symbolic creation, which unsettle every order based on linear transfers between text and context...What artistic-cultural practices do is actively dismantle and reformulate tensions and antagonisms via figurative languages that intervene in social discursivity, redistributing its signs, and changing them into new, multiple, fluctuating constellations” (67).

In making space for these constellations Vicuña transforms them from mere representation to enactment, as she reads from pages throughout the recital, taking up the role of the quipu reader who interprets for the audience. This resistance to the finality and stability of the written word can also be seen when she begins tearing out the pages of one of the books she is reciting from. Furthermore, she uses an openness to improvisation, seen when she stops to listen to the traffic of the surrounding city. Of course, in the written transcription some of these features need to be noted by footnotes, but the recitation of written words, the improvisation, and the transcription work to open up a space in which immanence is made meaningful, representing the gaps between discourses that must be negotiated. This includes, as we have seen, not only the performance itself, its recording and transcription, but the previous printed work of Vicuña, the oral communication of stories and myths picked up by the poet in her travels, and interlocutors such as Lola and the anthropologist who interviewed her, Anne Chapman. What is at issue here is not simply the physical reality of different mediums and sites, but rather a series of different classificatory genres that arrange these sites. And

Vicuña does not so much dissolve them in a totalizing gesture of absolute revolution, as link them through the translational space of the border in order to open up these genres to a reorganization along other lines as an autopoietic practice.

In line with the larger genealogy of decolonial struggle I have been charting, between sites as disparate and yet globally linked as the Caribbean, the Andes and Turtle Island, Richard argues that such works, which reconstitute memory outside of the structures of official coherence, are “inspired by a certain kinship that secretly aligned them, without premeditated agendas or methods” (3). This is how the space of the border, as a conceptual engagement, is able to actualize in different locations, bringing together different genres of humanity in new embodied interactions. It is a form of making knowledge from proximity, as opposed to what Fanon called a form of knowledge in which “men who no longer recognize each other, meet less and less and talk to each other less and less” (238). Instead, Vicuña brings forth “the heterogeneity of bodies and voices not subjected to the canon of the origin’s and the centre’s founding authority” (Richard 50). The border, beyond disciplinary obedience, defined by a decolonial poetics, holds promise for the instantiation of a politics of knowledge, of address and recognition, that can provide an ethics of relationality. Importantly, in making a conscious choice to decolonize, to pursue a new narrative in the name of political, epistemic, and human liberation, these movements seize on what Wynter calls the ‘non-opacity’ of human agency, recognizing, even as they reclaim ancient stories, that they as humans in proximity are responsible for sustaining the worlds that they live in, freeing themselves from the extra-human agency of modernity/coloniality that organizes the world around the universal abstraction of Imperial Man (Ceremony Found 244). This means that not only is decolonial thought arrayed along a principle of thinking from, which relies on a productive form of obscurity in resistance to the transparency of disciplinary decadence, but this thinking from is also always a thinking with, in which the translational space of the border provides a form of agency via the recognition of proximity and the need to sustain one’s relationships with distinct genres of humanity. The philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject is thus tied to a metacritique of reason actualized in the space of the border, and it is from this articulation of embodied concrete humanity that decoloniality forms an ethics of political liberation.

## Beth Brant's Politics of Address: Towards an Ethics of Liberation

By now I have examined the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject, as well as the space of the border as a translational space that critiques modernity/coloniality's construction of the world according to the organizing coherence of Imperial Man. I will now turn to look at the politics of address and recognition as a means of pursuing an ethics based on a project of political liberation and decolonial agency that is relational and creative. In doing so, I will consider how poetics, as part of knowledge production within interacting autopoietic fields, is able to advance a decolonial attitude, such that the poem itself, as part of a larger political-epistemic project, functions as a decolonial gift, an invitation to think from/with the poet while being conscious of one's own positionality. From this will emerge an ethics of love that is the basis for a path of decolonial healing - both through recognition of one's own dignity for colonized/racialized subjects as well as through the need to unsettle one's own investment in the normative fiction of Imperial Man and the sustaining process of colonial consumption.

In her poem "Telling" Mohawk poet Beth Brant confronts and negotiates the everyday and historical forms of violence that structure the relationship between the settler-state and Indigenous lives and bodies, rendering them and their ways of being and knowing in the world disposable. Against multiple forms of violence, Brant uses the poem to advance an alternative relationship based on love as a decolonizing ethics, one that is reciprocal rather than possessive, acknowledging its relationality rather than denying it. Brant asks her readers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to consider themselves in relation to these systems and histories of violence, with the goal of negotiating this inherited system of violence in order to heal Indigenous bodies and nations, while fostering decolonizing relationships of solidarity and accountability. Placing the poem in the critical horizon of heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism as specific formations of modernity/coloniality, I will track how Brant negotiates the inheritance of these global processes in the intimate space of the everyday, and how she asks her readers to negotiate these same violent relations in their own lives. Through the

shared experience of the poem as a decolonial gift, Brant and her readers open up a space of decolonial possibility, in which new political relationships create new horizons of ethical engagement.

I will divide this chapter into several sections. In the first section I will lay out the subject matter and context of the poem, beginning with the case of Helen Betty Osborne and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls from across Canada, placing these subjects within the context of settler-colonial heteropatriarchy. As a specific instantiation of the colonial difference, settler-colonial heteropatriarchy will provide a way of examining how Indigenous bodies are constructed as inherently violable in relation to the supposedly autonomous agency of settlers as a specific formation of Imperial Man. In the next section I will examine the poem's relation to this context, exploring the way it connects with and performs that subject matter. Key to this will be placing the gendered social relations of settler-colonial heteropatriarchy within the context of modernity/coloniality, as a project that is both material as well as epistemological. This will allow me to consider how Brant places the poem in relation to the violence she depicts, and the legacy of the English language as a tool of colonization, through an examination of the politics of recognition at work in the poem. Then, I will move on to consider the poem's figuration of the poet herself as someone who uses language to work with the inheritance of this violence, trying to reveal its connections and make sense of it all. This creates in the poem a concern with healing and accountability, fostered through a thematic focus on silence and secrets. These will be discussed through an examination of the politics of address in the poem and how she relates the violence to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. On the one hand, to Indigenous readers she will offer a relationship of healing, reclaiming Indigenous bodies and creating new relations of Indigeneity, through the figure of what Kelly Aguirre calls *AlterNatives*. For and from settlers, she seeks solidarity based on respect of Indigenous bodies and accountability. In each case she wants to foster a renewed sense of social relations and their entanglements with and beyond colonial consumption. Finally, this leads to a consideration of the poem itself, and the political ontology that it fosters as a mode of storytelling that foregrounds Indigenous epistemology and social agency based on love.

The most well known, that is to say, public, of the violence recollected by Brant is the case of Helen Betty Osborne. My information on Osborne is drawn from Amnesty International's 2004 report *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*. Born in Norway House, a Cree community in Manitoba, Osborne moved to the town of The Pas to complete high school and pursue higher education (Stolen Sisters 22). Due to assimilationist policies within Canada, it was necessary for Osborne to leave her community for the town of The Pas, as Norway House could provide only the first eight of the twelve grades (ibid). The Pas was a town with a population of about 6000, and deeply divided between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Importantly, an inquiry by the Manitoba Justice Department after her death found that "tensions between the two communities often turned violent, with the police failing to intervene" and "there was also a pattern of sexual harassment of Indigenous women and girls" which was itself routinely ignored by both police and the Department of Indian Affairs (ibid). This toxic and state-sanctioned situation came to a head for Osborne on the night of November 12, 1971 when, walking home from a dance, she was accosted and abducted by a car of four non-Indigenous men looking for sex (ibid). Refusing to follow the men, Osborne was abducted into the car, sexually assaulted and beaten, then taken to a cabin belonging to one of the men where she was beaten, and finally stabbed to death. It would be seventeen years before charges were laid, with one man sentenced to life, one acquitted and the two remaining men never charged (ibid). The Amnesty International report notes that the investigation was marred from the start by the RCMP's racism. The investigating officers treated Osborne's Indigenous friends and family as suspects rather than sources of information, taking them in for questioning while not taking the information they offered seriously (ibid, 23). This disregard for the testimony of those closest to Osborne, based on their Indigeneity, is most egregiously seen in the fact that not only did police fail to act on a tip naming the four men, but further, "although police were eventually convinced that these four non-Indigenous men were responsible for the murder, unlike the Indigenous youths, they were not brought in for questioning" and this knowledge lay in the community, un-acted upon, until the first charges were finally laid in 1986 (ibid, 23).



Brant invokes Helen Betty Osborne's story in "a dream about Betty Osborne. / The last secrets of her life. / Stabbed fifty-six times with a screwdriver" (Brant 62-5). Indeed, the violence of the act dominates the poet's imagination, perforating her consciousness in a way that parallels - without displacing through an easy equivalence - the violent stabs of the screwdriver that ended Helen Betty Osborne's life. Drawing this connection she asks "What can heal the writer who dreams of Betty Osborne and can only imagine her / words? / Her Last words, NO. NO. NO" (154-7). Brant thus focuses not only on the violence that ended Betty Osborne's life, but also on her resistance to this violence. However, attempting to carve the letters "BETTY OSBORNE" onto the paper, Brant is confronted with the distanced nature of the written word, the separation between the body subjected to violence and the poem, asking "why doesn't it [the paper] bleed for you, my throwaway sister?" (75). In her work *Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women: Settler Colonialism and the Difficulty of Inheritance* (2015), Amber Dean highlights the distance and lack of materiality that a name carries, noting that "names themselves tell us so little, almost nothing, about the women they represent if we did not know them in life" (Dean xxii). For both Dean as well as Brant, the names are meant not as a record that is capable of bearing witness to the life and death of the one named, but rather work to challenge readers to think about their own proximity to the name, and what forms of ethical agency this name requires. Brant's poem thus negotiates her inability to make sense of the name 'Betty Osborne' in a way that connects the distance possessed by the name itself to the denial of agency and proximity that structures the violence experienced by her and other Indigenous women. In order to make this violence proximate, and gain a sense of agency capable of healing Indigenous bodies as well as hailing the reader into a shared social space, Brant expands beyond the specific case of Helen Betty Osborne, connecting this violence to others through the words "RAPE. MURDER. TORTURE. SPEECHLESSNESS. INCEST. / POVERTY. ADDICTION," which index specific histories that Brant calls into being (70-1). It is from this combination of history and agency that Brant will give materiality to these words so as to make the violence endured by Indigenous women such as Osborne proximate, and therefore in need of ethical response.

This litany of violence that is visited upon the minds and bodies of Indigenous women is repeated throughout the poem several times, acting as a refrain that indexes the larger historical and social context in which the specific, everyday experiences of violence are set. Indeed, the poem itself is dedicated to “Celeste who told me to tell and for Vickie,” presumably the two women who share with Brant their stories of abuse, one in direct conversation and the other indirectly through a diary that she gifts to Brant (2,12). Through the refrain of “RAPE. MURDER. TORTURE. SPEECHLESSNESS” (102,104) as well as the linking of other stories of abuse with that told about Helen Betty Osborne, Brant places these seemingly individual and separate experiences in a shared context and history of settler-colonial heteropatriarchy. The RCMP report put out in 2015, *Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview*, notes that, in Canada across all police jurisdictions, there are 1,181 “incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal females... 164 missing and 1,017 homicide victims” from 1980 to the present (RCMP 3). While the report notes that 90% of the homicides have been solved, what concerns me here is the overrepresentation of Indigenous females in Canada’s homicide rate, and the social conditions that contribute to this fact (3). The Amnesty International report, given its wider scope and lack of affiliation with the settler-state, notes that “impunity for violence against women contributes to a climate where such acts are seen as normal and acceptable rather than criminal, and where women do not seek justice because they know they will not get it” (8). This impunity is bolstered by racist and sexist “stereotypes of Indigenous women as sexually ‘available’ to men” and a parallel refusal of police to see them as a community that needs protecting (17-8). Brant takes up this web of violence and state institutions in her poem, addressing her ‘throwaway’ kin and their survival through different experiences of violence that render them problem people. Importantly, just as Brant relates these separate acts of violence to “new words that do not exist in our own language” (Brant, 169), so does the Amnesty International report to the actions of the Canadian settler-state and its disposition of Indigenous lands and rights as the root cause of this violence (Amnesty International, 8). Brant notes that, in this relationship of dispossession and colonial consumption, “Betty, your crime was being a woman, an Indian” and this assertion can itself be seen as a confrontation with the epistemic injustice

and disciplinary decadence that would attempt to separate the death of Helen Betty Osborne from the ongoing history of settler-colonialism and patriarchy in Canada (Brant 66).

The production of Indigenous bodies as disposable, vulnerable to state and civil indifference, indexes the long history of settler-colonial heteropatriarchy in the destruction of traditional Indigenous kinship relations, genocide, and land dispossession. As Andrea Smith argues in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (2005) there is a close relationship between the sexual violence visited on the bodies of Indigenous women and the larger project of Indigenous genocide and settler-colonization. Constructing the body of Indigenous peoples generally, and women in particular, as dirty and degraded “the project of colonial sexual violence establishes the ideology that Native bodies are inherently violable - and by extension that Native lands are also inherently violable” (Smith, 12). In his essay “Cutting to the Roots of Colonial Masculinity” Scott L. Morgensen notes that when Europeans first came to Turtle Island, they encountered a “complementarity of Indigenous women’s and men’s authority” that structured the gender and social relations of Indigenous societies and tied them to the land (Roots, 42). Women were central to the nation, both as a means of reproducing the nation biologically, as well as through the transmission of knowledge and culture, providing links to the past that define Indigenous nations as autopoietic fields. Thus, in order to gain access to the land it was necessary to break up this gender complementarity, and as Smith notes, “patriarchal gender violence is the process by which colonizers inscribe hierarchy and domination on the bodies of the colonized” thereby rendering them, and their lands, disposable (Smith 23). This is the context in which Brant asserts that the crime of being an Indian and a woman results in a punishment of “mutilation and death” (Brant 67). Violence, in the settler-state, is thus the constitutive ground from which pre-contact gender relations, and their ties to the land, are broken, and Indigenous bodies come to be rendered disposable. Brant’s negotiation of this violence will thus work through what it means to be Indigenous in a settler society. As she says in the poem, Brant is “carving letters on yellow paper to understand the violence committed against/ us, by us” (58-9).

However, she also ties this mutilation and death to the silence of the town, a silence meant to “protect [the] whitemen” who were responsible for Helen Betty Osborne’s murder (70). This places the disposability of Indigenous women in a relational position to the agency and authority of the sovereign settler subject. As Morgensen argues, European forms of patriarchal subjectivity should be “understood as matters of achievement, as scarce goods, or as insecure or perishable if debility or certain gendered actions resulted in being ‘unmanned’” (Roots 41). Thus, attacks on Indigenous forms of gender complementarity or sexual variance at odds with the emerging structures of European patriarchy functioned not only to dispossess Indigenous nations of their lands, but further served to establish the basis upon which colonial authority and agency were produced. The very violence that forms Indigenous bodies as material devoid of agency, is thus also what forms settlers as individuals possessing a supposedly autonomous agency in a relation of colonial consumption in which Indigenous women are discarded while their lands and bodies are consumed for the benefit of the settler-state. Violence is thus the constitutive relation of settler-society, and represents not only a means of dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land and agency, but of re-educating them into hierarchical relations as colonized subjects of settler authority.

One way of enforcing this education, translating Indigenous bodies from sovereign subjects of their own autopoietic fields to racialized minorities, devoid of agency within the authority of the Canadian settler-state, was through the institution of Residential Schools. Although they do not appear directly in Brant’s poem, Residential Schools as a technology of cultural governance stand at the heart of the Canadian settler-state that is the context of the poem. As Sam McKegney argues, the Canadian nation-building project motivated Residential Schools, as the education of Indigenous youth into heteropatriarchal relations served to “delegitimize Indigenous modes of territorial persistence” in order to open up their lands for exploitation (2). This education was done through “public displays of violence and humiliation” meant to damage empathy and produce obedience, a fear of the body, and hatred of Indigenous women (1, 4). Furthermore, the effects of Residential Schools have been traced to the current internalization of heteropatriarchal violence in Indigenous communities, as seen in Brant’s figure of the foster child who’s crippled leg, “burn marks shrivelling the skin,”

functions as the mark of this internalized violence within Indigenous communities (Brant 30). Indeed, questioning whether it was the mother who burnt him, or if she merely took the blame to protect “her man’s secret”, Brant asks “what lengths and depths do we go to protect our own?” noting the ways in which loyalty to Indigenous community can sometimes reinforce internalized heteropatriarchal relations that value the agency and freedom of men over the wellbeing of women and children (Brant 31,33). Thus, separated from the kinship relations and gender cosmology that make up their autopoietic field, Indigenous subjects are produced as individual members of a racialized minority in Canadian society. Further, as noted above, this is a process that not only produces the sovereign settler-state, but also the form of masculine agency and subjectivity that it establishes as a normative value. To examine this confluence of violence and authority, vulnerability and agency, and the means by which it is naturalized, I will now turn to a consideration of settler-colonialism.

As Patrick Wolfe argues, while it makes use of racialized and gendered regimes of violence, the primary motivation of settler-colonialism as a structural coupling “is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory” (Wolfe 388). This is accomplished through a logic of elimination and control that, as we have seen, is predicated on a violent negation of pre-colonial autopoietic fields, as well as translation of pre-colonial subjects into the emerging settler-state. Ultimately, “settler colonialism destroys to replace” in a relationship of colonial consumption that accumulates at the expense of those it consumes (388). And, as has been shown through my examination of heteropatriarchy, this replacement has disastrous effects for Indigenous subjects, who find themselves vulnerable to violence and at the whims of the controlling agency of the settler-state. Apart from Residential Schools, another facet of settler-colonialism can be seen in the Indian Act, which works to define Indigenous identity in a way that makes it manageable for the settler-state with the ultimate goal of assimilation. As Morgensen argues, the Act “exemplifies the role that colonial masculinity plays in institutionally containing Indigenous people as subordinates to settler rule,” contributing to the breaking up of Indigenous nations and imposing a patrilineal structure of authority and agency (Roots 49-50). Under settler-colonialism then, the law itself becomes a means by which the founding violence of the settler-state is codified and naturalized in a territorial nomos.

Indeed, authority, agency, and knowledge production become entangled in the Canadian settler-state as an autopoietic field maintained by a violent process of colonial consumption.

In this process of colonial consumption the figure of the settler as Imperial Man provides coherency. This coherency in turn legitimizes a production of knowledge that works through the denial of either the severity of Canada's colonial past, or the continued relevance of this past to contemporary social conditions. For instance, legislation such as the Indian act that controls and manages definitions of Indigeneity also works to produce the figure of 'the Native' as one that is always disappearing into a lost authenticity, whose world is past and whose destiny is absorption into a capitalist modernity. However, as Wolfe argues "settler colonialism is not some transitional phase that gives way to...the emergent global order" but rather is foundational to it (Neoliberal 113). The sovereign separation of settler and Indigenous agency, constructed in a hierarchical relation of authority from the perspective of the settler-state, "continues in new forms, constituting new frontiers appropriate to the emergent mode of accumulation on a global scale" (114). In connecting settler-colonial structures to the global order, Wolfe highlights the global aspect of settler-colonial authority, and its constitutive entanglement with processes of modernity/coloniality. Thus, the contemporary functioning of settler-colonialism and Imperial Man allows the relational nature of colonial agency and authority to be ignored while justifying it as the result of Indigenous subjects stuck between an authentic past and true modernity, who are failing to disappear in the proper way and so must be made to disappear through violence.

It is this process of structural coupling underlying the settler-state that Brant acknowledges when she notes that "they taught us new words" and "they stole our speech and raped our minds" (Brant 69,77). Importantly, language here indexes not only the confrontation of separate histories, but separate epistemologies as well. As Kelly Aguirre argues "decolonization not only requires confronting and dismantling structures of colonial power [i.e. colonial heteropatriarchy] but also a pervasive coloniality that renders Indigenous ways of being and knowing dependent on external 'recognition' and so consistently denied" (Aguirre 185). Thus, settler-colonialism as a material as well as

an epistemological project, allows us to mark how modernity and colonialism are not separate phenomenon, but rather constitutive of each other in the production of subjectivity, agency, and knowledge. Indeed, this collusion can be seen in Smith's argument that modern forms of epistemology based on Eurocentric histories have functioned to produce Indigeneity as the object of study, never as the legitimate producer of knowledge (Queer 44). It is therefore only by turning away from these epistemologies that decolonial forms of agency can be established from which to create a new relationality capable of combating the violence leveled at, and productive of, Indigenous bodies.

I will now pursue this by looking at Glen Sean Coulthard's concept of the politics of recognition, a direct response to the universalizing reach of modernist epistemology. Writing in response to a change in settler-Indigenous relations to a tone of recognition of Indigenous difference and reconciliation of Indigenous rights with the sovereignty of the settler-state, Coulthard argues that the relationship is still a colonial one, in which Indigenous subjects continue to exist as racialized minorities subject to the agency and authority of the settler state. He argues that this happens for two reasons. Firstly, it reifies the settler-state as a legitimate authority, absolving it of its continued colonial relationship by which "the terms of recognition tend to remain in the possession of those in power" (Coulthard 39). That is, with no mutual proximity in terms of recognition, the terms by which this recognition is produced are firmly in control of the settler-state. Secondly, similar to the internalization of heteropatriarchy by Indigenous subjects, Coulthard also argues that these same subjects can form psychosocial "attachments to these structurally circumscribed modes of recognition" (18). This is where Coulthard advocates for a collective 'turning away' from colonial modes of recognition to "initiate the process of decolonization by first recognizing themselves as free, dignified and distinct contributors to humanity" (43). That is, Indigenous subjects must turn to each other and a revitalization of their own traditions and knowledges. He says that "by contrast, the approach to recognition advocated [by him and others] explicitly eschews the instrumental rationality central to the liberal politics of recognition and instead demands that we enact or practice our political commitments to Indigenous national and women's liberation in the cultural form and content of our struggle itself" (159). That is,

a turn towards Indigenous modes of knowledge and being as autopoietic fields that disrupt colonial consumption, rather than trying to prove their humanity in the model of Imperial Man and so gain access to colonial authority and agency founded on violence.

This move beyond a lens of colonial recognition leads to a consideration of poetry as an autopoietic practice, turning the poem from a means of liberal representation to a form of political agency that can be conceived as ‘linguaging’. For example, Brant asks in the poem “if love could be made visible, would it be in the enemy’s language?” (Brant 55). This places language itself in the frame of settler-colonialism, implicating it in the violence faced by Indigenous bodies. Similarly, Brant also asks “what good is a poet that doesn’t remember the language her grandfather / taught her?” (73-4). Thus, language in the poem is a means of negotiating the violence of colonialism, manifested in the loss of her own language and the broken transmission of knowledge between her and her grandfather, as well as the entanglement of language with systems of violence that negate Indigenous agency. By shifting focus to the colonial legacies that are entangled with modernity, it thus becomes possible to see poetry as one of many discursive genres that are formed in ambiguous support of the settler-state. Against the fixed forms of grammar and control over language, Mignolo puts forth the idea that “it is linguaging, thinking and writing between languages...[that will] allow us to emphasize, moving away from the idea that language is a fact (e.g., a system of syntactic, semantic, and phonetic rules), and moving toward the idea that speech and writing are strategies for orienting and manipulating social domains of interaction” (Local/Global 226). Linguaging brings to the fore the relation of the body to the underlying structures through which language makes it legible or not: “My anger burns me. I feel as if I have swallowed hot grease” (Brant 35). Furthermore, in linguaging the written word becomes a political relationship, indexing the desire to social and political healing, that is, decolonization. Thus, for Brant, despite its entanglement with the violent history and present of settler-colonialism, the English language is ultimately “the only weapon I know how to use” (Brant 181). Brant thus places the poem as an intervention, taken up from the perspective of Indigeneity, into the violent processes of heteropatriarchy and the settler-state, effecting a movement from ‘the Native’ as object of study to producer of knowledge that Smith advocates.



Languaging, and Brant's use of language in the poem, thus ties together history, the body and language, as the body of the poet herself becomes a medium by which the violence of settler colonialism comes to be known and acknowledged. For example, Brant asks several times in the poem 'what good is a poet?' and states that "I hear those words today and they hang like a knife - or a screwdriver - / over my head, reader to pierce me and render me / speechless" (80-3). Fraught with violence then, the question of the poet's role becomes not just one of recognizing settler-colonial violence, but of reacting to it in a way that revitalizes non-colonial agency. Furthermore, the role of the poet as medium comes through connecting the violence directed at Indigenous bodies and the lives and privileges of settlers. This is mobilized through the theme of silence and secrets. Against the silences that are incurred to maintain settler modes of power and agency, Brant establishes reciprocal relationships with the Indigenous figures of the poem. For instance, in the opening of the poem, Brant notes that one of her interlocutors "gives me this / secret" (10-11). The secret becomes a trope that exists somewhere between the negating silence of the settler-state, and an appropriation of those secrets that would deny the tellers themselves any sort of autonomy, and thus reproduce the authoritative agency of Imperial Man. Indeed, the question becomes not so much what Brant does with the secrets, but rather "what does she do with the need of someone to tell?" (28). Claiming that "I have to tell. / It is the only thing I know how to do" the agency of the poet is to act as a medium for those who have been targeted by the violence of settler-colonial heteropatriarchy (196-7). However, she also claims that "I must keep the secrets safe" highlighting that it is a shared and reciprocal agency, one that respects the autonomy and agency of those who give her their secrets (87). The keeping and telling of secrets thus becomes a form of proximity that seeks to expose complicity of the settler state with colonial, patriarchal violence, while at the same time pointing to a relationship of responsibility with her subject that is non-coercive, non-hierarchical, sustained by reciprocity rather than violence. "I want my words to be Medicine" she later says, hoping that by making these secrets visible in a way that respects their teller's own agency and experiences she will be able to give them back the dignified relationships and knowledge of themselves necessary for decolonization (141).

Existing in language as a political act, a state of constant translation, Brant seeks a new form of knowledge that connects bodies, and engages the reader with questions, while not making her own agency as poet dependent on the subsumption and management of her subject matter into stable system of hierarchical relations. This can be thought through Maldonado-Torres' idea of the decolonial gift. In the context of decolonial thought, Maldonado-Torres argues that concepts need to be thought of as invitations to dialogue and not as impositions. They are expressions of the availability of the subject to engage in dialogue and the desire for exchange" (Being 115). This expression of availability is one that seeks a new ethics, beyond the non-ethics of colonial recognition, and works to structure thought as a border space in which reader and thinker are brought into proximity. In offering her poem as a form of healing, Brant allows us to see that the poem is itself a form of decolonial gift which asks one to teleologically suspend one's investment in processes of colonial consumption and identification with the figure of Imperial Man as the guarantor of knowledge and agency.

The poem as a decolonial gift leads to a new construction of audience, through a queered politics of address. In her work on the intersections of queer theory and Indigenous studies, Andrea Smith notes how a subjectless critique can open up questions as to who is the political subject of a given theory: "A subjectless critique can help Native studies (as well as ethnic studies) escape the ethnographic entrapment by which Native peoples are rendered simply as objects of intellectual study, and instead can foreground settler colonialism" (Queer 46). That is, through a queer reading we can help place identities within the history of power relations within settler-colonialism, eschewing a dichotomous relation of an authentic Indigenous particularity to modern Eurocentric universalism for a focus on relations of power in an autopoietic field. Martin Joseph Ponce extends this concept from theory to literature, advocating a queer theory of reading, that will exceed either of the privileged frames - race or nation - by which minority literature is usually classified, tracking the way that "literature addresses multiple audiences at once and how those multivalent addresses are mediated through gender, sexuality, eroticism and desire" (2). If the focus on the poet articulates who is doing the writing, and the content being written about, then a politics of address examines who is being written to, and acknowledges that for decoloniality, this who is always

multiple. Thus, what Ponce advocates is “a practice of connectivity, of seeking out relationalities that form beyond the strictures of normative social boundaries. Theorizing reading in this manner enables us to reconceptualize identity as unfixed, permeable, and mutually interdependent on others” (32). What emerges is a mode of address that is destabilized, with no transcendental political referent, but rather a shifting one, in which the identity through which readers relate to the poem is formed in their proximity to the poet through the poem. This requires a decolonial attitude that “demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as insignificant” (Being 116).

A queer politics of address thereby leads to a split in Brant’s audience, between those hailed as Indigenous subjects and those hailed as settlers. However, in each case, the reader is asked not to witness the poem, as a static representation disconnected from their everyday life, but rather to encounter it and consider what Amber Dean calls practices of inheritance, ways of living in the wake of the structures of violence and events that link the poem to its autopoietic field. This is a complex idea developed by Dean, in conjunction with other thinkers, and revolves around the reader confronting and negotiating their implicatedness “in the violence or suffering experienced by others” (6). Quoting Roger Simon, she notes that practices of inheritance are practices whose “outcome is not guaranteed in advance, the work of inheritance is an inescapable consequence of the actions of another who has sent you something” (3). Of course, this gift can always be denied, and the vulnerability of Indigenous women to violence, and the disregard of this violence can be seen as refusals of this inheritance in affirmation of Imperial Man and colonial consumption. Dean goes further however, to note that, as opposed to a limited conception of witnessing, in which an empathetic attachment is made by reducing difference to a universal category of sameness, practices of inheritance work by drawing attention to the historical structures of power that form the relationship of inheritance. Against an identification that erases structures of power, or a distance that negates a shared space and humanity, practices of inheritance seek to ethically challenge the reader to locate themselves relationally to the poem (Dean10).

In hailing her audience as Indigenous, Brant asks them to see themselves in relation to the model of Indigeneity that is offered in the poem, opening up a form of relationality that can configure Indigenous identity capable of resisting the authoritative and violent control of the settler-state. Importantly, this is not a vision of Indigeneity that simply resurrects static traditions, but rather a form of what Aguirre calls *AlterNatives*, built by attending to everyday practices “that aren’t responsive to colonial power” (Aguirre 192). Thus, the practices that Brant figures in the poem are through the everyday sharing of conversation and recording, such as when she “receive[s] a package in the mail / When I open it, a diary falls into my hands” (12-3). The everyday, private practice of diary keeping, and the gift of it to Brant, thus figure an Indigenous resilience that occurs in spaces that are not legible to the settler-state as political resistance. Similarly, the communication of stories, across distances and in person, becomes a mode of relationality that extends Indigeneity across the settler-state in excess of a supposedly static authenticity. As Aguirre says: “This shift is effectuated by upholding stories of resistance to and resilience through violence, but crucially those that also regenerate and refigure still existing, particular and substantive alternatives to colonial forms of relationality” (185). Thus, rather than starting from a static authenticity located in the past, Brant locates the bonds of a resurgent Indigeneity in the present, working from an acknowledgment of violence while finding everyday practices of Indigenous resilience that ground the resurgence of Indigenous autopoietic fields. For instance, the people in the poem whose stories she negotiates as inheritance, and offers to the readers, are, despite their violent experiences, cast as innocent: “Her face is wide, innocent, clear” (1-2). Importantly however, this is not an abstract innocence but a proximate one, embodied and in need of nurturing, as when she says to her foster child: “You were innocent. You were difficult” (48). The fusion of difficulty and innocence comes to enact the negotiation of Indigenous identity and knowledge in the violence of the settler-state, and the kind of reciprocal agency needed. What emerges for the poet as medium is thus a form of relationality that re-centres Indigenous gender relations, as when Brant says that “today I woke bleeding from my vagina...” in order to centre her female body as a medium for knowledge production and agency (95-100). There are a multitude of bonds formed throughout the poem through the bodies of Indigenous women, some face to face,

some through long distance communication, and some, like the story of Helen Betty Osborne, the throwaway sister, through a shared space of heteropatriarchal violence. Ultimately, what emerges is a relationality that is premised on the re-centering of Indigenous gender cosmologies that value women as knowledge producers and active agents. The ultimate value is placed not on rigidly prescribed roles, but rather on a shared sense of agency “Do I give her what she needs? / A friend. A secret-keeper. / Love.” (106-8). What is needed is not mere biological reproduction, but a reciprocal relationality that can protect and heal without resorting to hierarchical and authoritative forms of agency, and that calls Indigenous people to acknowledge and act on this relationship, to heal themselves and their kin.

She further links her turn to Indigenous community with an exploration of the consequences of this turn for settlers, the solidarity and accountability that is asked of them. By calling the potential reader into existence as a settler, Brant thus invites them into a relationship of solidarity and accountability to Indigenous peoples in the context of continuing settler colonialism, treading the line between sameness and difference and highlighting the entangled nature of agency and violence. Initially there is a line drawn between Indigenous and settler in terms of their relation to the scenes of violence that the poem mediates: “I love. They do not” says Brant, noting the initial distance that colonialism fosters in settler who see violence against Indigenous bodies as none of their concern (Brant 93). This absence of love in the settlers indexes the disposability of Indigenous lives and the ways that this violence and its connection to colonialism is rendered unintelligible. Against this the poem asserts its knowledge through the voice of the poet and her retelling of Indigenous stories against the silence meant to ‘protect white men’. By highlighting the role of settlers, and addressing them in a way that differentiates the audiences of the poem, she seeks to actualize the relationships of settler colonialism in the experience of the poem, the ways that settler agency is formed in relation to heteropatriarchal violence, and the implicatedness that every settler must face. This encourages a mode of settler-Indigenous relationality built on solidarity and accountability, respect for Indigenous bodies, knowledge, agency and authority that allows settlers to work together “without the impetus to absorb” and neutralize Indigenous struggles (Aguirre 202).

Finally, I will consider the political ontology of the poem itself, how it holds together its various histories and relationships to effect love as agency, Indigenous relationality, and epistemic justice. Stewart-Harawira argues that in response to the violent and controlling structures of modernity/coloniality, what is needed is a “new political ontology for being together in the world” (134). Brant herself asks in the poem: “if love could be made visible, would it be on the skins of trees” drawing a connection between the need for a new relationship of being based on love and the mutilated present of settler-state violence (188). Through the practices of secret keeping, responsible telling, and poetry, Brant seeks a regeneration of Indigenous relationality that can make steps toward this ontology of love. Indeed, her practice of transmission based on reciprocal agency and respect can be seen as a form of what Aguirre calls story work “a mode of knowledge (re)production and transmission centred in the responsibility of storytelling that also acknowledges and draws out the narrativity of all knowledge practices” (Aguirre 184-5). Thus, the stories that Brant mediates are modes of knowing that reproduce a decolonial epistemology. The multiple stories and the politics of address of the poem work to braid stories into a conversation, placing the negotiation of stories and structures of power at the centre of the poem. Similarly, Brant makes use of several quotes by other Indigenous women poets, constructing an autopoietic field in which these new stories gain meaning through relationality. Ultimately, the conversation started by Brant seeks to “cut through to a place I can barely imagine” (Brant 115). This place would be the non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical, non-violent space of decoloniality. While the poem is set firmly in the present, responding to and negotiating settler, heteropatriarchal inheritance in the space/time of the poem, it thus offers an ambiguous hope for a future of decolonial love and healing. As she says at the end of the poem: “Love as piercing as the screwdriver’s thrust. / Love as searing as the marks on an infant’s leg. / Love as clear as her face. / Love as clean as a sheet of yellow paper. / Love as honest as a poem.” (191-195). Love is thus an embodied ethics of solidarity and proximity built on political liberation in recognition of the decolonial gift of the poem, addressed to those willing to engage in the decolonial attitude.

Ultimately, Brant eschews a politics that sees Indigenous agency as legible only when recognized by the settler-state, opting for a political ontology of liberation that

places Indigenous resistance in the context of Creation as “an ongoing process of renewal of which humans are only a part” (191). Poetry is one such form of renewal, bringing together diverse bodies in solidarity to produce a new potentiality for decolonizing relationships based on a form of agency that is non-dominative and reciprocal. What emerges from this new political ontology of liberation, which places the decolonial subject in the space of the border, is thus an ethics of the decolonial attitude. From this politics of address emerges a new human community, oriented towards the sustaining of concrete humanity via an ethics of liberation, that is, a recognition of our co-humanity and the intimate relation between decolonial healing and the unsettling need to betray one’s investment in Imperial Man and colonial consumption.

## Conclusion

In the introduction, I developed the concepts modernity/coloniality and decoloniality. I showed that modernity cannot be thought without coloniality, and that decoloniality grounded itself as both critical practice and productive creation of new horizons based on alternative memories and cosmologies. Noting that decoloniality is a political-epistemic project that seeks to transform the material-symbolic ordering of the world, I argued that decolonization is thus an autopoietic practice. In doing so, I defined modernity/coloniality as a particular organization of the world through a process of structural coupling conceptualized as colonial consumption around the figure of Imperial Man as the model of humanity. I concluded by arguing that an insurgent poetics was a necessary part of challenging the disciplinary decadence of knowledge production by tying knowing to the social composition of bodies.

In the first chapter, I turned to Aimé Césaire and the Black Caribbean in order to examine the philosophical anthropology of the decolonial subject. Locating Césaire as a Black Caribbean subject in the Black radical tradition, I read his work in relation to Mignolo's concept of the geo- and body- politics of knowledge. In doing so, I was able to place Césaire's poetics in a complex relationship to the historical and social reality of the Black Caribbean within modernity/coloniality, arguing that a poetic practice of thinking from this embodied positionality relied on an anthropology of the human as *bios* and *logos*. Furthermore, I argued that the productive obscurity of thinking from was such that the decolonial subject was formed so as to exceed and destabilize the structures of knowledge which had formerly consigned the Black subject to a mode of visible absence.

In the second chapter, I built on this philosophical anthropology by placing it in the space of the border, looking to the work of Cecilia Vicuña. Building off of Mignolo's understanding of *nomos* as the juridical and political ordering of social space, I argued that the constitution of such space as unitary also involved the narration of origin stories that served to legitimize its ordering of bodies. In doing so, the process of colonial



consumption could be seen as a point of antagonism whereby an unequal structural coupling between two autopoietic unities is naturalized as a single autopoietic field for the benefit of a normalized subject – in this case for that of humanity as Imperial Man. Against this I proposed the space of the border as a space of proximity, where bodies are brought together in their distinctness and the knowledge of their need to sustain their shared world. Thus, what emerges is a form of translational agency that works to redistribute the unequal structural coupling to create a new autopoietic field inhabited by diverse genres of the human.

In the final chapter, I turned to the work of Beth Brant in order to show how the poem, in the space of the border and in relation to decolonial subjectivation, functions as a decolonial gift that engages the reader in an ethics of political liberation. Basing my analysis on the structures of settler colonialism that produce Indigenous vulnerability as the grounds for settler agency, I looked to how a politics of address could work to convoke different readers into a shared inheritance of the burden of history.

Thus, through these engagements with the work of diverse poets, I have been able to draw out a series of principles that decolonial poetics, in bringing together the three concerns broached by Lewis Gordon which organized my investigation, are able to articulate in regards to knowledge production as an autopoietic practice of thinking from/with. In the first place, decolonial poetics has provided us with a means of seeing the act of thinking from embodied subjects as a creative act of productive obscurity. Resisting the ontological transparency of disciplinary decadence, productive obscurity thus works by thinking from the history and geopolitical positionality of the body in ways that push beyond the abstract systems of knowledge that modernity/coloniality deploy in order to manage the world. Second, this productive obscurity, when placed in the space of the border, works to destabilize the processes of colonial consumption that construct bodies in service to modernity/coloniality. Against the distance of Imperial Man is thus offered a living in proximity that is always a thinking with concrete subjects in distinctness. Sustaining this distinctness leads to a form of translational agency that is constantly forming and reforming the world in recognition of an irreducible sociality. Thus, the productive obscurity of the decolonial subject is joined to a non-opacity of

social agency, in which humanity recognizes its role in creating and sustaining our shared worlds. Finally, this relation between obscurity and non-opacity leads to a consideration of the politics of address and recognition that structure ethical engagement. This provides us with the principle of the decolonial gift based on an ethical attitude of open engagement in the shared, though differently experienced, burden of history. Thus, any process of decolonial healing is tied to an unsettling of normative orders that in turn requires those who benefit from colonial structures to betray their investment in Imperial Man. Taken together, these principles lay the ground for a global ordering of pluriversality.

Pluriversality is an ordering of knowledge across different autopoietic formations. This is a way of rejecting the disembodied, abstract universal truth that sustains modernity/coloniality and Imperial Man, while articulating knowledge as a practice of Gordon's 'living thought.' Thus "the roads to global futures shall be thought out in the scenario of interactions, conflicts, and dialogues among coexisting options, without hoping that one of them will overcome the other and impose itself on the rest" (Darker 44). Following from this recognition that "the question is not to compete among different concepts of 'humanity,' but to start from the fact that non-Western notions more or less equivalent to what in the West were constructed as man" knowledge production becomes an autopoietic process of structural coupling (242). Thus "the decolonial option is the singular connector of a diversity of decolonial paths" and a way of putting into contact different situated modes of self-reflection (121). Rather than an abstract, disembodied universal then, universality becomes a reflection on one's "limitation by engaging one's distinct situation" in a way that requires an engagement with difference via a pluriversal dialogue that can transform these limits into possibilities for transformation and complex solidarity (Vallega 147).

In this dialogue "the only singularity would be the connectors (not empty signifiers) that would anchor pluriversality as a universal project" and provide points of contact through which translational agency can manifest across different decolonial paths (241). It is from following these decolonial paths, within the overall context of a decolonial horizon of pluriversality, that autonomous communities will find ways of

articulating their past and present traditions of knowing and doing outside of coloniality, such that, as Robert Warrior argues “those traditions make the future a possibility, just as they did for the people with whom the traditions originated” (106). Ultimately, Mignolo argues, “I am not referring to something already fixed but to a constant process of building the very concept of decoloniality, of devising a route of action, of transforming ourselves into decolonial subjects” (Further Thoughts 26). This process is individual and communal, an autopoietic self-organization articulated in the concept of thinking from/with those racialized and colonized subjects who have been incorporated into the modern/colonial world system through the process of colonial consumption. Doing so will result in a restoration of agency, not only to the dominated, but to those who see themselves in the figure of Imperial Man as well, since their agency is sustained only by their autopoietic entanglement in coloniality. Our co-identification as humans, as hybrid beings, can never “pre-exist each society’s specific mode of autopoietic institution” (Ceremony Found 201). Pluriversality then, seeks an articulation of the global in which, recognizing the hybrid nature of humanity, the human is not an abstract figure, but rather a concrete embodiment linked across differences in recognition of a shared agency in the organization and sustenance of material-symbolic relations.

Poetics as thinking *from* and *with* is thus a means through which to connect these distinct autopoietic fields beyond the coherence offered by Imperial Man and colonial consumption. The decolonial principles mentioned above – productive obscurity, translational agency, ethics of liberation – provide a means through which the production of knowledge can be opened up to embodied forms of self-reflection in an ethical engagement across concrete social relations. However, there remains an irreducible contingency to this articulation, an ambiguity that promises no easy resolution of harmonious co-existence but a continuous, creative emergence that must be actively and collectively sustained. This ambiguity persists across different articulations of bodies, knowledges, histories and cosmologies as political-epistemic divisions organized in services to the structures of modernity/coloniality. Insurgent poetics as a decolonial gift articulates shared desires to transform this ambiguity from a political-epistemic problem into an impetus for social experimentation, driving the recognition that we are radically responsible for our shared existence. For decolonial thought then, humanity cannot be

known through any single figure capable of ordering all social formations, but rather through the articulation of distinct genres of the human within a global autopoietic field capable of sustaining concrete human existence.

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